

FROM FLESH TO FANTASY: CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS OF THE
CHINESE AFTERLIFE IN SPIRIT-TRAVELOGUES AND MYTHOLOGICAL
THEME PARKS

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My dissertation analyzes the influence of conceptions and representations of the religious afterlife on individual and collective action in contemporary Taiwan. The critical study of representations of the Chinese afterlife has occurred almost exclusively in their anthropological *locus classicus*: the ancestral tablet, funerary ritual, and the underworld (Ahern 1973; Wolf 1974; Cohen 1988). My research, which builds on these foundational inquiries, focuses on two alternative and fecund fields of otherworldly (re)production and representation: recent textual depictions of the afterlife and mythological theme parks. In this study, I will address both textual sources and ethnographic data to launch an inquiry into three key research questions concerning conceptions of the afterlife in Taiwan today: namely, (1) the struggle between individual desire and collective concerns, (2) the applicability and adaptability of traditional models of the religious afterlife, and (3) the processes by which representations of the afterlife illuminate and influence contemporary social systems. My analytical framework – inspired by practice theory, psychoanalytic thought, and psychological anthropology – illuminates an otherwise overlooked integrity in conventional Chinese conceptions of the afterlife and reveals the emotional correlates of their continuities and changes in current Taiwanese society.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Brian Gosper Brereton currently resides in California with his wife Emily and daughter Siena. Upon completion of his dissertation he plans on seeking employment with the federal government or in the field of applied anthropology.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
 PART I: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE AFTERLIFE	 6
CHAPTER 1: INVESTIGATING ANTHROPOLOGY AND RELIGION	7
CHAPTER 2: ANTHROPOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE	36
 Part II: A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE CHINESE AFTERLIFE	 72
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF HELL	76
CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF PARADISE	100
CHAPTER 5: POPULAR CHINESE LITERATURE	136
 Part III: CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS OF THE CHINESE AFTERLIFE	 162
CHAPTER 6: TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE	166
CHAPTER 7: PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE	222
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	256
 APPENDIX	 274
BIBLIOGRAPHY	603

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation analyzes the influence of conceptions and representations of the religious afterlife on individual and collective action in contemporary Taiwan. The critical study of representations of the Chinese afterlife has occurred almost exclusively in their anthropological *locus classicus*: the ancestral tablet, funerary ritual, and the underworld (Ahern 1973; Wolf 1974; Cohen 1988). My research, which builds on these foundational inquiries, focuses on two alternative and fecund fields of otherworldly (re)production and representation: recent textual depictions and mythological theme parks. In this study, I will address both textual sources and ethnographic data to launch an inquiry into three key research questions concerning conceptions of the afterlife in Taiwan today: namely, (1) the struggle between individual desire and collective concerns, (2) the applicability and adaptability of traditional models of the religious afterlife, and (3) the processes by which representations of the afterlife illuminate and influence contemporary social systems.

My analytical framework is inspired by practice theory (Bakhtin 1981; Bourdieu 1977; Vygotsky 1962), psychoanalytic thought (Freud 1961; Lacan 1977; Klein 1986), and psychological anthropology (Ewing 1997; Obeyesekere 1981). By “practice theory,” epitomized by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and his concept of socialized subjectivity or “habitus,” I mean an articulation of the ways in which individual identity is both product of, and continually produced by, collective social forms. While practice theory aspires to allow for individual agency within society, the concept of habitus has been criticized (Fowler 1997) as inadequate to the task of delineating fully how individual desire and interest motivates social action. Psychoanalysis, unjustly criticized as just priapic preoccupation or biological reductionism, promises a means to push beyond practice theory toward a deeper understanding of how individuals are recruited to the values of their culture. This

accommodation of practice theory and psychoanalysis will provide a lens into the on-going dialectic between individual daily life and persistent collective meanings. This mode of inquiry should illuminate an otherwise overlooked integrity in conventional Chinese religion and reveal the emotional correlates of its continuities and changes in current Taiwanese society.

The expressive social importance of Chinese representations of heaven and hell has attracted the attention of several scholars (Song 1982; Eberhard 1967; Gómez 1996). Yet to date, none of these studies have focused on the means by which such tales are produced. My investigation proposes to address this hiatus by focusing specifically on the processes and participants that presently produce these imaginaries. Taiwan is a densely populated nation where citizens constantly confront moral dilemmas and personal frustrations, impelled in part by social and political tensions. These historically particular tensions – along with others of a more general duration focusing on the family and individual existential concerns – all, I hypothesize, constitute part of the social milieu from which contemporary representations of the afterlife are created. But to assert this is one thing, while to show how this comes to be is another. The combination of textual and ethnographic information I propose to analyze can contribute uniquely and significantly to precisely such a demonstration.

Spirit-Travelogues

My ethnographic fieldwork, funded by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award and an Aisiang Cultural Foundation Su Tian-shui Memorial Fellowship (*Jinian Su Tianshui xiansheng nanying xue yanjiu jiang* 紀念蘇添水先生南瀛學研究獎), commenced with an investigation of contemporary textual and visual depictions of the afterlife in Taiwan. I focused primarily on the adherents of a popular religious temple in Taizhong called the Hall of the Sages and Worthies (Shengxian tang 聖賢堂). These devotees and their former spiritual guide,

Yang Zanru, produced two of the most popular morality books in Taiwan today, *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* (Diyu youji 地獄遊記) and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (Tiantang youji 天堂遊記).¹ Morality books (Jordan and Overmyer 1986; Katz 1999; Duyvendak 1952) have long been distributed for free and serve as primers on social responsibility for many Taiwanese. These two popular texts detail horrific punishments throughout sixty-two journeys to purgatory and magnificent rewards during thirty-six trips to paradise. Though the author, Yang, has subsequently left this temple to establish a Chan Buddhist monastery nearby, he has recently illustrated *Journey to the Underworld* in popular comic book style and still visits the afterlife at the request of his new parishioners. Taiwan's largest Buddhist monastery, the Light of Buddha Mountain (Foguang shan 佛光山), has also recently launched publication of a series of religious comic books which feature brutal battles between muscle-bound monks and despicable demons.

The creators of these texts and artistic representations constantly level conservative critiques against an ever-modernizing nation (Clart 2005; Pas 1989). In depictions of purgatory, adult fans of provocative pop music are attacked by enormous bees, irresponsible drivers are forced by menacing demons to drag heavy carts up rocky hills in a supernatural Department of Motor Vehicles, and dance hall patrons are forced to dance on searing-hot iron floors. In representations of paradise, humble and agriculturally-employed citizens quickly ascend to heaven while haughty residents of skyscrapers are portrayed as trapped within tombs of iron and steel. These collective concerns – which clearly express a fear of the future and longing for the past – are best characterized in the popular saying, “People’s hearts are not what they once were”

¹ While an English translation of *Journey to the Underworld* is already available, I recently completed a 260-page translation of *Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (which I intend to make available to the Taiwanese temple from which it originated and all interested scholars).

(*renxin bugu* 人心不古). Yet this collective will often collides with individual desire. During Yang's eighth journey to purgatory, his guide waves a magical rush-leaf fan² to open the foreboding gates of hell. Yang exclaims, "My dear master, can you please give me your magic fan to use on earth? I will show people my magic power by using your fan." Yang is quickly admonished: "You must not indulge in vain hopes and immoral thoughts. Why then do you want to ask for my fan? Do you want to show off?" (Yang 1978:39). Though the creators of these textual and visual depictions attempt to carefully tread the path between moral education and popular entertainment, what repercussions are caused by modeling religious figures on brutal and tawdry comic superheroes?

Mythological Theme Parks

The second ethnographic focus of my dissertation is on Taiwan's three mythological theme parks: the Prefecture that Represents Heaven (Daitian fu 代天府) in Madou, the Palace of Southern Heaven (Nantian gong 南天宮) in Zhanghua, and the Pure Land Cave (Qingtu dong 清土洞) at the Light of Buddha Mountain. These mythological theme parks feature garish sculptural depictions of the afterlife and are supervised by elderly temple personnel who collect mandatory "donations" and run each scene's animatronics for dating couples who ascend into paradise and rowdy groups of high-school and college-aged boys, who typically descend to visit purgatory. Physical representations of the afterlife as tourist destinations are not a new phenomenon in China. Stone grottoes featuring similar scenes of heaven and hell date back to before the Tang dynasty (McNair 2000; Kucera 2005) and temples with mechanized demons have been said to actually scare their visitors to death.³ Until

² Reminiscent of the fan that Monkey stole in the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*.

³ Goodrich (1964) writes of a popular tale near the start of the 20th century which maintained that a visitor to Beijing's Temple of Eighteen Hells (Shiba diyumiao 十八地獄廟) died from fright when a demon, mechanically activated by temple personnel, caught his foot as if to drag him to hell.

recently, elementary schools organized fieldtrips to the horrific courts of hell – visits often prompted by misbehavior – but stopped not long ago due to fiscal cutbacks. Many adults recall such visits as formative and return to reminisce about what was once so frightening. Purgatory is still employed as a disciplining tool for naughty children called “little ghosts” (*xiaogui* 小鬼), whose evil actions karmically condemn them and their parents to hell, while paradise is held as lofty ideal for well-behaved children, labeled “little bodhisattvas” (*xiao pusa* 小菩薩).

Theme parks are acknowledged as influential sites of cultural production, reinforcing social surroundings through their over-exaggerated depictions of social norms and taboos, environments termed “hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1995). I will employ and evaluate literature on theme parks (Gottdiener 1997; Hannigan 1998) from the locally contextualized perspective provided by my research. I will also reveal the shifting definition and role of the theme park in relation to its emergence in East Asia (Hendry 2000, Raz 1999; Stein 1990). What does the emergence of such parks tell us about social change and cultural continuity? Though the original referent for scenes of heaven and hell is a now extinct imperial, bureaucratic system, these representations have remained relevant in their ability to fulfill contemporary needs. Entertaining as horrific and humorous, these otherworldly environments invite interpretation with respect to how Buddhist and Daoist notions of paradise constitute a narcissistic fantasy of our individually desired state of being (Cohen 1988). In contrast, purgatory, as the initial afterlife destination for all deceased in Taiwan, is posited as the location where we can banish the ambivalent feelings towards our family members, specifically our parents as agents of socialization (Freud 1961; Jordan 2004). Shown formative models of desired and undesired behavior (Klein 1986), visitors stand in a space of active ambivalence where they are torn between which social roles they desire or are obligated to fulfill.

PART 1

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE AFTERLIFE

Part one of my dissertation contains a theoretical investigation of religious conceptions of the afterlife. I will devote my opening chapter to a brief investigation of sociocultural anthropology, with a particular emphasis on the accommodation of practice theory and psychoanalysis. I will then turn my attention to anthropological studies of religion in an attempt to situate my own project within the rubrics of postcolonialism and secular humanism. I believe that this combination of disparate heuristics will allow my analysis to acknowledge both the benefits and detriments that religious conceptions can potentially offer.

My second chapter, focused on formulations of the afterlife, will begin with a brief investigation of anthropological examinations of these otherworldly imaginaries. While anthropologists have generally focused on the collective repercussions of participation in formulations of the afterlife, I will also include an inquiry into possible individual interests and injuries. Although my dissertation is focused on contemporary conceptions of the Chinese afterlife, I have chosen to employ textual and ethnographic examples from contemporary Christian representations of the hereafter for three reasons. The first is an attempt at some measure of self-reflexivity, the second is my hope that these examples will be more familiar to Western audiences and allow me to focus on building a theory of the afterlife without becoming mired in extensive descriptions, and the third purpose for including Christian representations of the afterlife is to provide another paradigm for comparison of contemporary Chinese representations of heaven and hell.

CHAPTER 1

INVESTIGATING ANTHROPOLOGY AND RELIGION

What is anthropology? Franz Boas (1858-1942), the father of contemporary American cultural anthropology began his book, *Anthropology and Modern Life*, with this same, simple question.⁴ Boas explains, “Anthropology is often considered a collection of curious facts, telling about the peculiar appearance of exotic people and describing their strange customs and beliefs. It is looked upon as an entertaining diversion, apparently without any bearing upon the conduct of life of civilized communities” (1928:11).⁵ Boas, one of the earliest proponents of cultural relativism, ethnography, and comparative ethnology, believed that anthropology could make substantive claims about a society’s present and future. He proposes, “I hope to demonstrate that a clear understanding of the principles of anthropology illuminates the social processes of our own times and may show us, if we are ready to listen to its teachings, what to do and what to avoid” (Boas 1928:11). These principles, anticipated by Boas in the early twentieth century, remain the central tenets of anthropology today, a discipline which still strives to provide analyses which are holistic, field-based, and comparative (Lavenda and Schultz 2003).

Anthropology’s claim to be holistic, particularly as it relates to the study of humanity in its four-field approach, has recently been disparaged by some

⁴ Some scholars have attempted to locate the origins of anthropology with two prominent figures of the Greek Enlightenment, Plato and Herodotus. Dell Hymes explains, “The temporal horizon was greater for Plato than for most Europeans before well into the nineteenth century, for Plato speculated in terms of evolutionary developments over nine thousand years. There was also – and this would seem indispensable – some sense of distance from received tradition, in consequence of internal social and intellectual change” (1999:21). Hymes continues with a discussion of Herodotus, “Each subsequent period that we can think of as marked with greatness will resemble his, in that an opportunity was seized to find order in newly perceived diversity, to try to explain a new horizon of knowledge in regard to human nature and culture...and of a hope for the future” (1999:22).

⁵ Unfortunately, this view has persisted among some readers to this day. As Richard Dawkins has proposed, “Anthropologically informed works, from Sir James Frazer’s *Golden Bough* to Pascal Boyer’s *Religion Explained* or Scott Atran’s *In God We Trust*, fascinatingly document the bizarre phenomenology of superstition and ritual. Read such books and marvel at the richness of human gullibility” (2006:36).

anthropologists as social evolutionism (Segal and Yanagisako 2005). Yet anthropology remains one of the few disciplines in which practitioners are free to draw upon methodologies and heuristics from the social and natural sciences, as well as the humanities. This latitude remains one of the field's greatest strengths and weaknesses. As Vincent Crapanzano proposes, "Anthropology seems chaotic. There is no central text (though there have been frequent attempts to privilege some texts – those of Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown – to establish a canon). Indeed, there is little agreement on the subject matter of the discipline and on its parameters" (1992:294). Although anthropology's disciplinary borders are permeable, there is generally a consensus among cultural anthropologists that some methodological tools, such as ethnography, have been very effective in studying society.

The second principle of modern anthropology is the insistence on field-based research. Boas and his students were counted among other early anthropologists (Malinowski 1922; Mead 1928; Evans-Pritchard 1940) who advocated for, and participated in, ethnographic fieldwork. Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) was particularly outspoken against scholars like E.B. Tylor (1832-1914) and James Frazer (1854-1941), labeled "armchair anthropologists," who predominately studied accounts of distant cultures collected by others. Hymes has proposed that carefully constructed ethnography is still "the main asset cultural and social anthropology bring today to a unified social science" (1999:25). While ethnography was once associated with the colonial enterprise, "subjects" and "informants" have become "interlocutors" and "collaborators."⁶ As Hymes explains, "It is true that an outsider may notice what an insider takes for granted, but ethnographic research increasingly depends not on

⁶ For Arjun Appadurai (1986), the fact that the anthropological "field" is almost always located elsewhere is potentially problematic. Appadurai (1986:37) explains that if anthropologists are not careful, their "theoretical metonyms," simple, gatekeeping concepts such as hierarchy in India or filial piety in China, can quickly become the only line of questioning relevant to a particular region.

impressions, but on systematic inquiry of a sort that gives great advantage to members of the culture themselves” (1999:32).⁷

The final principle common throughout modern anthropology is the penchant for comparison.⁸ Hymes proposes, “There are then two primary moments in the constitution of a general anthropology: interest in other peoples and their ways of life, and concern to explain them within a frame of reference that includes ourselves” (1999:11). Although the bulk of a carefully constructed ethnography is often concerned primarily with the differences between the investigated “other” and one’s own culture, an anthropologist’s most emotive contributions often occur when they focus on humanity’s collective commonalities. Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner was struck during his fieldwork by the similarity between himself and those he studied in something he termed “the metaphysical gift.” Stanner explains, “I mean the ability to transcend oneself, to make acts of imagination so that one can stand ‘outside’ or ‘away from’ oneself, and turn the universe, oneself and one’s fellows into objects of contemplation. The second ability is a ‘drive’ to try to ‘make sense’ out of human experience and to find some ‘principle’ in the whole human situation” (1956:57).

To the three primary principles – holistic, field-based, and comparative – that comprise the description of modern sociocultural anthropology provided by Lavenda and Schultz (2003), I would add that anthropologists also attempt to provide some form of constructive criticism which, ideally, can contribute to “the liberation of

⁷ This “advantage” given to viewpoints from members of a particular culture should not be mistaken for uncritical acceptance.

⁸ Attempts at comparison, particularly in the contemporary era, are fraught with complications. As Appadurai explains, “As the societies under consideration become more complex, literate, and historical, the kind of decontextualization that facilitates generalization becomes harder to accomplish. Comparison also becomes difficult when theoretical interest focuses on qualitative, subjective, and experiential aspects of social life, rather than on quantitative, objective, or structural phenomena” (1986:359).

mankind” (Hymes 1999:7). This occurs in very concrete denunciations of cultural constructions such as racial inequalities (Boas 1940) and practices like human rights violations (Farmer 2003). Or, more commonly, this constructive criticism can be found in culturally relativistic ethnographies which aspire to provide readers the intellectual space and tangible examples needed to see others –and themselves – from a different perspective.⁹ The colonial anthropologist’s “voice of authority” has now been largely transformed into that of a cultural advocate whose critical perspective can be heeded, ignored, or argued against. As Hymes explains, “By helping members of a community to comprehend social reality more explicitly and generally, one may help people to...be in greater rational control of their own destinies” (1999:54).

Anthropological Theory

Practitioners of this holistic, field-based, comparative, and constructively critical anthropology found themselves in a state of theoretical stagnation at the end of the 1950s. Sherry Ortner explains that during this period:

The theoretical *bricoleur*’s kit consisted of three major, and somewhat exhausted, paradigms – British structural-functionalism (descended from A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski), American cultural and psychocultural anthropology (descended from Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, *et al.*), and American evolutionist anthropology (centered around Leslie White and Julian Steward, and having strong affiliations with archaeology). [1984:128]

Anthropological theory began to flourish in the 1960s and was influenced by two major schools: symbolic anthropology, founded independently by Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, and structuralism, created by Claude Lévi-Strauss. While Geertz (1973) focused on human interpretation of the world through symbols, “For Turner, symbols are of interest not as vehicles of... ‘culture’ – the integrated ethos and worldview of a

⁹ As Ortner explains, “Although constraints of material and political sorts, including force, are fully acknowledged, there seems to be general agreement that action is constrained most deeply and systematically by the ways in which culture controls the definitions of the world for actors, limits their conceptual tools, and restricts their emotional repertoires” (1984:153).

society – but as what might be called *operators* in the social process, things that, when put together in certain arrangements in certain contexts (especially rituals), produce essentially *social* transformations” (Ortner 1984:131). Lévi-Strauss mapped Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1966) separation of *langue* and *parole*¹⁰ onto an investigation of culture in an attempt to uncover underlying structures of meaning. Structuralism also focused on grouping bundles of contrasting themes found in ritual and myth,¹¹ and tracing these themes throughout the societies which produced them.

Although anthropology enjoyed this period of prosperity, symbolic anthropology and structuralism contained some glaring theoretical shortcomings. For symbolic anthropology, these deficiencies included its lack of a systematic sociology, an underdeveloped notion of the politics of culture, and its indifference towards the processes of production and maintenance in symbolic systems (Ortner 1984:132). In the case of structuralism, the denial of the relevance of an intentional subject and rejection of the impact of history on these social structures was most problematic. These theoretical shortcomings were addressed as anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s turned their attention to Marxism and practice theory.

Interest in structural Marxism and political economy was not a return to the vulgar materialism present in anthropological theories such as cultural ecology.¹² As Ortner proposes, “The specific advance of structural Marxism over its antecedent forms of materialist anthropology lay in its locating the determinative forces not in the natural environment and/or in technology, but specifically in certain structures of social relations” (1984:139). This focus on ideology also provided anthropologists the insights, conspicuously lacking in symbolic anthropology, to critique the mystification and exploitation present in the politics of culture and explore the processes of

¹⁰ For more on these linguistic concepts see Jonathan Culler (1986).

¹¹ Lévi-Strauss (1963:211) termed these “mythemes.”

¹² For more on theories of cultural ecology see Julian Steward (1955).

legitimization and mediation present in cultural production and maintenance. Political economists, concentrating on the effects of capitalist penetration in traditional communities (see Ortner 1984:141), also contributed to the theoretical advance of anthropology by widening the ethnographic scope from its narrow focus on traditional, small-scale societies to a perspective that included national and international political and economic systems.

Practice Theory

The limitations of structuralism, a heuristic which ignored individual intentionality and the influence of historical change, prompted Pierre Bourdieu to formulate his practice-oriented approach in an attempt to accommodate both objective and subjective. In addition to providing social scientists the means to grapple with structure and agency, practice theory was appealing for additional reasons. These are found in its similarities and differences to Marxism, attention and openness to “real” social phenomena such as temporality, and an effort to produce self-reflexive analysis.

Practice theory was founded on some of the most important advances introduced by a Marxist-oriented approach. As another mode of social criticism, it remains concerned with demystifying social processes and maintains that “the real is the relational” (Fowler 1997:85), while moving beyond some of its greatest weaknesses. Ortner explains that practice theory:

Has no need to break the system into artificial chunks like base and superstructure (and to argue over which determines which), since the analytic effort is not to explain one chunk of the system by referring it to another chunk, but rather to explain the system as an integral whole (which is not to say a harmoniously integrated one) by referring it to practice. [1984:148]

Another advantage of an approach focused on practice is the potential expansion of subject material from infrequent, ceremonial action to that of everyday living. Hymes explains that when employing practice theory, “There is a traditional place for

openness to phenomena in ways not predefined by theory or design – attentiveness to complex phenomena, to phenomena of interest, perhaps aesthetic, for their own sake, to the sensory, as well as intellectual, aspects of the subject” (1999:42). Practice theory also devotes attention to influential processes such as temporality, commonly neglected in theoretical investigations of social practice.¹³

Bourdieu’s formulation of practice theory also insisted on a measure of self-conscious, non-narcissistic reflexivity. As Hymes has proposed, “An essential part of ethnography is to learn, and formulate, what others already in a sense know” (1999:53). This process of learning and formulation, certainly necessary to the creation of ethnography, is also fraught with the danger of improperly interpolating one’s own interests into the narratives of those one is studying. Reflexivity is particularly problematic in anthropological methodologies such as participant observation.¹⁴ Bourdieu proposes that while researchers may be diligent in recognizing and minimizing the ways their own ethnocentricities distort their representations of others:

The anthropologist’s particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place (except by choice or by way of a game) in the system observed and has no need to make a place for himself there, leading him to reduce all social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations. [1977:1]

Thus reflexivity must account for a researcher’s interests – and disinterests – in the particular social system and cultural participants they have decided to study.

¹³ As Bourdieu explains, “To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its *tempo*” (1977:8).

¹⁴ For a critique of this methodology, which some have argued is neither participation nor observation, see Rosaldo (1986).

Practice theory's most exciting development, and most relevant to my investigation of the afterlife, is its attempted theoretical accommodation of both collective concerns and individual interests. Early anthropological theories, such as structuralism, eschewed social phenomenology in favor of what was viewed as a more objective – and thus more “scientific” – approach. As Boas proposed, “The group, not the individual, is always the primary concern of the anthropologist” (1928:13). Anthropologists in the 1980s became interested in practice theory when they realized that individual agency was significant, interesting, and could be studied scientifically. Bourdieu explains:

We shall escape from the ritual either/or choice between objectivism and subjectivism in which the social sciences have so far allowed themselves to be trapped only if we are prepared to inquire into the mode of production and functioning of the practical mastery which makes possible both an objectively intelligible practice and also an objectively enchanted experience of that practice. [1977:4]

Bourdieu constructed his theory of practice around three primary principles: field, habitus, and doxa.

Bourdieu outlined his conception of the field (*champ*)¹⁵ which, as John Thompson explains in his introduction to *Language and Symbolic Power*, “may be seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the different kinds of resources or ‘capital’ ...A field is always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of capital specific to it” (1986:14). Though this formulation of the field contains the economic term “capital,” Bourdieu expanded the definition of this word to include other types of desirable resources such as “cultural capital,” knowledge and other cultural acquisitions, and “symbolic capital,” accumulated prestige or honor. Fields,

¹⁵ Bourdieu alternatively employs the terms “market” and “game” in reference to the field (1982:14).

which can be autonomous or interrelated, only exist when individual agents tacitly acknowledge the terms of the “game,” demonstrated by their willingness to “play.”

This tacit acknowledgement occurs in the lasting dispositions, which Bourdieu has called *habitus*,¹⁶ continually produced within individuals by objective social forms. Bourdieu, who borrowed the term from Marcel Mauss, explains that *habitus* works as, “Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’” (1977:72). This conception of *habitus* is particularly significant because it accounts for collective structures while allowing for individual agency. As Ortner explains, “Practice anthropologists assume that society and history are not simply sums of ad hoc responses and adaptations to particular stimuli, but are governed by organizational and evaluative schemes” (1984:148). The dialectical give and take of objective and subjective which occurs in Bourdieu’s formulation of field and *habitus* is maintained by what he calls *doxa*.

Bourdieu’s formulation of *doxa* consists of the misrecognition of arbitrary social conceptions as natural (1977:164). Ortner explains that while individuals participate in the temporal, spatial, and social structures that organize the fields in which they play, “Actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organizational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those principles in the world of public observation and discourse” (1984:154). This process of reproduction causes social participants to mistake the fundamental, unconscious, and often dominant beliefs which inform their actions as obvious truths. Although this formulation of *doxa* appears at first glance to be much like Marx’s conception of

¹⁶ Ortner has proposed, “Both Bourdieu’s *habitus* and Sahlin’s ‘cosmological dramas’ behave in many ways like the American concept of culture, combining elements of ethos, affect, and value with more strictly cognitive schemes of classification” (1984:148).

ideology, in practice theory, culture is no longer thought of as contributing to a process of mystification. Instead, as Ortner explains, “The problem is not that of the system telling lies about some extrasystemic ‘reality,’ but of why the system as a whole has a certain configuration, and of why and how it excludes alternative possible configurations” (1984:153).

While practice theory introduced many advances utilized by anthropologists, an emphasis on reflexivity, the expanded understanding of capital to cultural and symbolic realms, and an accommodation of both structure and agency, it has been criticized as containing some theoretical inadequacies. The most glaring deficiency in Bourdieu’s practice-oriented model is its failure to account for how individual desires and interests motivate social action. While Bourdieu was a vehement opponent of rational action theory (1992:124-126), which proposes that individual agents make economically motivated decisions which are constantly calculated and conscious,¹⁷ he created a methodology which similarly lacks the nuance to sufficiently grasp a broad range of individual interests. Ortner proposes that the motivation assigned to actors within a practice-oriented approach “is that of an essentially individualistic, and somewhat aggressive, actor, self-interested, rational, pragmatic, and perhaps with a maximizing orientation as well” (1984:151).¹⁸ Ortner continues:

Although pragmatic rationality is certainly one aspect of motivation, it is never the only one, and not always even the dominant one. To accord it the status of exclusive motivating force is to exclude from the analytic discourse a whole range of emotional terms – need, fear, suffering, desire, and others – that must surely be part of motivation. [1984:151]

¹⁷ See Michael Allingham (2002) and Green and Shapiro (1994) for acclamation and criticism of this position.

¹⁸ Although Bourdieu (1992:126) has denied that this is the case, claiming that individuals are neither rational actors nor as capable as Johannes Kepler’s *angelus rector* (a far-seeing angel thought to regulate the course of the planets), individual motivation in practice-oriented analyses does seem to be predominately based on interest theory (though the scope of what actors are interested in has been widened to include the cultural and symbolic).

Bourdieu's approach to motivation may be slightly more complex than that of interest theory, but its scope is certainly still too narrow.¹⁹

In addition to neglecting the complexities of individual motivation, Bourdieu disregards similar nuances in his call for reflexivity,²⁰ theory of play,²¹ and critique of the unconscious.²² These theoretical inadequacies seem to stem from Bourdieu's antipathy towards Freudian psychoanalysis, a methodological system from which he borrowed extensively whilst simultaneously denying its importance. Delivering a scalding diatribe Bourdieu proposes:

Psychoanalysis, the disenchanting product of the disenchantment of the world, which leads to a domain of signification that is mythically overdetermined to be constituted *as such*, forgets and causes it to be forgotten that one's own body and other people's bodies are only ever perceived through categories of perception which it would be naïve to treat as sexual. [1977:92]

While Bourdieu is certainly correct to critique psychoanalysis for its early obsession with sexuality, psychoanalysis still promises the means to push beyond practice theory toward a deeper understanding of how individuals are recruited to the values of their culture.

¹⁹ Ortner (1984:150) also proposes that motivation in practice theory has also been critiqued as too shortsighted, with individuals acting according to implicit, somatic, and ad-hoc dispositions. Yet this line of argumentation seems irresponsible, to critique Bourdieu for painting individuals as too rational and then not rational enough.

²⁰ Katherine Ewing explains that by ignoring the Freudian tools of transference and countertransference, "Anthropological self-consciousness about the issue, imbedded as it typically is in an antipsychological project, has given rise to a spate of self-reflective texts that often substitute introspection bordering on self-indulgent reminiscence for accurate insight into the effects of the interviewer on the research" (Ewing 1992:252).

²¹ Crapanzano similarly proposes that the employment of Freudian tools such as transference would avoid oversimplified models of play which "may give conceptual elegance to their descriptions but does not do justice to the 'play' that occurs in the transactions themselves" (1992:302). Crapanzano explains, "Freud's discussion of transference alerts us, in a very special context, to the interdependent play of multiple, articulated, quasi-articulated, unarticulated, and inarticulatable role modalities in any transaction" (1992:302-303).

²² Bourdieu also attempts to provide a gross oversimplification of the unconscious, in which he proposes, "The 'unconscious' is never anything other than the forgetting of history which itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus" (1977:78-79). As Freud (2003; 1913) has successfully argued, the importance of the unconscious occurs not just in forgetting, but also in the process of resurgence.

Psychoanalysis

Practice theorists such as Bourdieu are not the only social scientists who have openly criticized psychoanalysis as disenchanting, preoccupied with sex, and applicable only to male, affluent, Western individuals. Freudian psychoanalysis is disenchanting. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is a downer who frequently dribbles pronouncements like, “What we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery” (1961:38). Freud was also too preoccupied with the priapic. Ewing argues, “When desire is reduced to the biological, its significance as a force that constitutes the subject within a political order is obscured” (1997:253). And finally, Freudian psychoanalysis was not formulated with all of the social systems and individuals to which it has been applied in mind.²³ Yet despite these scalding – and often accurate – critiques, Freud introduced a new frontier, the individual and the unconscious, and the elegantly complex methodologies and heuristics to understand it: transference, countertransference, drive, censor, etc. Psychoanalysis is also attentive to a level of nuance, what Ewing has termed the “multiple layers of significance that are embedded in every communication,” (1992:257) not present in anthropology prior to its importation.

Before investigating Freud’s fundamental formulations, I will briefly recount the sordid history between psychoanalysis and anthropology. This history is analogous in many ways to that of psychoanalysis and practice theory, in that anthropologists also borrowed from Freud while failing to acknowledge his contributions. As Ewing explains, “Victor Turner and Lévi-Strauss, for instance, imported basic analytic tools of psychoanalysis into mainstream anthropology twenty-five years ago, but they did so while simultaneously criticizing Freud or denying his direct relevance to their work,

²³ While discussing the many condemnations of the universality of psychoanalysis, Michele Stephen aptly stated, “In today’s postmodern intellectual climate, grand theory is not in vogue” (1998:1173).

thus obscuring their debt to psychoanalytic theory” (Ewing 1992:252).²⁴ These criticisms, leveled by some of anthropology’s most prominent practitioners, were generally the same as those presented by practice theorists: psychoanalysis was not scientific,²⁵ it failed to account for social collectivities, and its theories could not be universally applied.

While practice theorists like Bourdieu attacked Freud’s research as unscientific because it was based on the sexually motivated individual, anthropologists remained wary for additional reasons. Freud’s writings have been divided by many scholars into two categories: his scientific explanations, which were based on psychological research, and his random ruminations on society and culture. Sociocultural anthropologists have expressed reservations with both styles. Antipsychological anthropologists, such as Clifford Geertz, criticized Freud’s empirical writings as collective myopia.²⁶ Ewing explains, “In his seminal formulation of the anthropological project, Geertz argued that only phenomena which were public and shared should be considered the proper object of interpretation” (1992:252). Freud’s later cogitations on culture, characterized by his concept of the primal horde, patricide, and subsequent formation of the Oedipus complex in *Totem and Taboo*, are also troubling to some anthropologists who maintain that this approach is not scientific.²⁷ Obeyesekere proposes:

²⁴ These contributions to anthropology were located primarily in psychoanalysis’ “way of moving from static approaches to the interpretation of symbols, in which equivalences are merely identified, to a way of getting at symbolic processes” (Ewing 1992:258).

²⁵ In reference to this line of criticism, perhaps Freud responded most eloquently when he stated, “It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings” (1961:11).

²⁶ Geertz has consistently lashed out against psychology, which he has labeled, “That raffish outcast discipline to which social anthropologists are forever consigning phenomena they are unable to deal with within the frame work of a denatured Durkheimianism” (1973:109).

²⁷ As L. Bryce Boyer reminds, “Early anthropological critics of *Totem and Taboo* ignored Freud’s quiet statement in that book that his position was conjectural and that it could be interpreted as a just-so statement” (1980:269).

For contemporary social anthropology to search for origins is near heresy. In this sense we are more primitive than those we study, for, right through human history, imaginative men in almost every culture have sought the origins of their society and institutions and, often enough, the origins of life on earth. The difficulty of anthropological studies of origins is well known; origins land us in the despised area of pseudohistory. Unfortunately, our fear of pseudohistory has inhibited us from developing techniques for studying origins. [1981:15]

The universality of Freud's discoveries, particularly the Oedipus complex, were also questioned by cultural relativists – hesitant to accept a masculine and westernized formulation of identity formation and familial tensions – to be ubiquitously relevant.²⁸ Yet only Freud's psychoanalytic theories, particularly those focused on illuminating the unconscious and motivation, provide the requisite tools to grapple with the role of the individual in the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of cultural systems.

The operations of the unconscious were concretized in Freud's analyses of the dream. Freud argued that all dreams contain some form of wish-fulfillment (1913:435), often shaped by desires which are suppressed or forbidden (1913:193). When a wish is repulsive enough to wake the dreamer, a process of censor occurs to ensure that the sleeper is not disturbed (Freud 1913:120). Freud found that by dissecting the contents of a dream, he could identify a process which he termed "displacement" (1913:286-287), in which the censor shaped the dream through the under and over-exaggeration of psychological details.²⁹ Freud proposed, "The stricter the domination of the censor, the more extensive becomes the disguise" (1913:121). This discovery of unconscious desires – which could be analyzed and shared with a conscious patient – and their disguises, prompted Freud to outline a structural model of the psyche which included three apparatus: id (*das Es*), ego (*das Ich*), and superego (*das Über-Ich*). As Giorgio Agamben explains, these psychoanalytic understandings

²⁸ Ewing explains that these anthropologists misinterpreted Malinowski's arguments "despite the glaring flaws...that have been effectively pointed out by Spiro (1982)" (1992:251).

²⁹ Freud also discovered that many dreams appeared at first glance to be brief experiences, shortened by the psyche through a method that he termed "condensation" (1913:261), while their complete descriptions required a lengthy narrative.

of the unconscious were applied to individuals both sleeping and awake when, “Language becomes the site of a conflict between that which one can consciously know in any utterance and that which one necessarily says without knowing” (1991:89).

An investigation of these unconscious, repressed motivations is one of Freud’s greatest contributions to the social sciences. Freud proposes, “Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life” (1961:51). Freud identified repressed, a-cultural drives as the primary, unconscious motivator for individuals and bifurcated the id (inner desire) – responsible for the basic instincts of sex and aggression – into two fundamental drives: eros, the instinct related to life and love, and thanatos, the instinct associated with death. Freud proposes that it is this tension between the drives which motivates both individual action and the “evolution of civilization” (1961:82).

Although Freud began the conversation on individual motivation, many anthropologists and psychoanalysts have since found his biologically based model to be too mechanical and narrowly focused.³⁰ As Ewing explains, anthropologists “found little to enlighten them in the terminology of drive psychology, with its depiction of the driving force of the psyche as a timeless cauldron of aggressive and libidinal (oral, anal, and phallic) impulses untouched by culture” (1992:256). While Freud may have focused on the libidinal nature of the id, his description of the drives, mediated by the role of the ego and superego, can also be expanded to include cultural conditioning. Ewing proposes, “Individuals have a variety of aims which are often inconsistent. Though from the perspective of a drive model, it may be possible to distill aims to

³⁰ Ewing explains that Freud’s conception of desire has, to its detriment, “been privatized and located within the apolitical sphere of the medicalized psyche” (1997:253).

their biological or cultural essence” (1992:256-257). While the definition of individual motivation can be expanded to include both biologically and culturally informed desires, anthropologists have also expressed their disquiet with assuming the mantle of therapist.³¹

This hesitation stems primarily from postcolonial anthropologists’ unwillingness to continue what they view as the one-sided exploitation of the anthropological *object* in unchallenged, Western-based analyses. By assuming the position of therapist, the argument goes, anthropologists are explicitly broadcasting their supposed superiority over subaltern subjects. While anthropologists (Appadurai 1988; Asad 1982; Said 1989; Fabian 1990) are not wrong to call for an interrogation of the epistemological construction of anthropological objects of inquiry, I submit that a more useful analysis can be produced for both anthropologists and interlocutors. Postcolonial (and postmodern) anthropologists have disabled themselves through different means with analogous outcomes: unable to offer help for fear of looking like their colonial forebears or unsure that “help” should/can be offered at all. As Ewing explains, “It would seem that the concern for giving the other ‘voice’ in anthropological discourse...is actually a therapeutic concern or perhaps a fear of having any impact on the life of one’s informants” (1992:263). Instead of attempting to equalize or ignore an inequitable relationship, anthropologists can embrace their unavoidably empowered position and utilize their unique perspective to produce an ethnography which attempts to provide a meaningful contribution (whatever that may

³¹ Georgina Born proposes, “It is time to drop the problematic of pathology. In examining social and cultural processes, we should acknowledge that psychoanalysis bequeaths a set of tools for analyzing the complete spectrum of human states. This is why, despite a recognition of its historicity, psychoanalysis may be generalized and used as part of a hermeneutic process of gaining critical insight into sociocultural phenomena without imputing either judgments of clinical pathology or questions of practical intervention” (1998:373).

mean).³²

The acknowledgement of inequalities between anthropologist:interlocutor or therapist:patient does not mean one must condone the social, religious, economic, and political conditions which contributed to the production of these inequalities. In fact, just the opposite is true. As Bourdieu proposes in his discussion of the persistence of masculine domination in social structures, “It forces one to see the futility of the strident calls of ‘postmodernism’ philosophers for the ‘supersession of dualisms.’ These dualisms, deeply rooted in things (structures) and in bodies, do not spring from a simple effect of verbal naming and cannot be abolished by an act of performative magic” (1998:103). By attempting to transcend asymmetrical dualisms through dialogue or *discourses*, postmodernists ignore or reproduce the unequal relationships they condemn.³³ P. Steven Sangren’s explanation of a realist epistemology captures the spirit of my call for the acknowledgement of these inequalities:

I am proposing that by placing social reality in the position of object of analysis and invoking it as the source of authority for the representations we produce of it, social reality can be said in some sense to occupy a position of logical transcendence. Moreover, it is this epistemological structure that allows the analyst to occupy the empowered position, that is, the position to produce the analysis. In implicitly assuming this empowered position, the analyst’s will to truth does not disguise a will to power, as some critics have argued; the will to power is clear and conscious. The analyst cannot avoid producing himself or herself as an empowered subject in the process of producing the analysis. The analysis is undeniably a *representation* of social reality, but once produced, of course, it also becomes a part of that reality. [1995:27]

³² As Hymes has argued, “When we study local communities, we cannot escape assumptions, open or hidden, as to that for which they hope and as to what can be hoped for them” (1999:14). These hopes, for many anthropologists, may entail something like the “ultimate fulfillment of human potentiality” (Hymes 1999:11) for the members of the communities among which we work.

³³ Postmodernists have created a theoretical imaginary that contributes to a reproduction of power that is remarkably similar to religiously informed imaginaries of the afterlife. Sangren explains, “Foucault’s formulation of power, by equating power’s effects of truth to social reality and disallowing the theorization of the productive effects of misrecognition (which would require a notion of truth beyond the effects of power), elevates power itself to a transcendence similar to that occupied by heaven in Chinese cosmology” (1995:26).

An acknowledgment of the inequalities between the social or psychological analyst and their subject/patient allows the analysts to utilize their perspective in an attempt to bridge the gap (which is not the same as attempting to *transcend* the gap) between them.

Anthropologists, even those willing to acknowledge the unequal relationship between themselves and their interlocutors, are still often reluctant to assume the role of therapist. As Ewing has suggested, “The psychoanalyst’s strategy is to use the paradox, the tension between participation and observation, as a tool for accomplishing a therapeutic goal. But here the analogy between the psychoanalyst and the anthropologist apparently breaks down. Anthropologists do not have a therapeutic goal. Or do they?” (1992:263). I would argue that anthropologists must have a therapeutic goal – although the scope of what therapy entails should be expanded to include not just mental health but social, economic, and political well-being – in order to produce an interesting, substantive, and accessible ethnography.³⁴ To achieve these therapeutic aims, anthropologists could employ the psychoanalytic technique of utilizing the inequalities between analyst and patient (or anthropologist and interlocutor) “as a projective screen on which the patient gradually learns to recognize the ways in which he traps himself in a subordinate position” (Ewing 1992:263). The goal of both therapist and anthropologist seems to intersect at this juncture when, as Ewing explains, in a successful analysis the “patient comes to experience the

³⁴ I mean accessible in two ways. First, an ethnography should be available to the community which the anthropologist takes as his or her subject of inquiry. In my case, this has included returning an English translation of *Journey to the Halls of Heaven* to the temple that produced the original text and making all of my research notes and materials available to native scholars at the Aisiang Cultural Foundation (紀念蘇添水先生南瀛學研究獎) in Taiwan. Second, available also means that an ethnography is as comprehensible linguistically and conceptually as possible to its community of origination.

psychoanalyst as an equal who has no actual power over him in the social world” (1992:263).³⁵

An accommodation of psychoanalysis and practice theory will provide the nuance needed to comprehend the on-going dialectic between individual daily life and persistent collective meanings. While both positions contain inherent theoretical shortcomings, their negatives are neutralized when these heuristics are utilized together. While practice theory grapples with both collective concerns and individual interests in an intrepid attempt to move beyond the strong bias in the social sciences that “culture must deal exclusively with group processes rather than with individual motivation” (Obeyesekere 1981:1), only psychoanalysis provides the tools necessary to do so. And while psychoanalysis portends applicability to more than just masculine, affluent, Westerners,³⁶ it can only be responsibly applied when utilizing the careful consideration of particular cultural systems and procedures found in practice theory.³⁷

Anthropology and Religion

These introductory peregrinations into anthropological theory have laid the foundation for an investigation of anthropology’s relationship with religion. The history of anthropological studies of religion followed a similar course – and featured many of the same practitioners – as general anthropology, with one initial caveat.

³⁵ Jean Pouillon has also outlined the similarities between psychoanalysts and anthropologists explaining, “The analyst and the ethnologist both are rooted in one and the same culture, and perhaps stand on the same ‘anthropological’ ground. If they are not aware of this, it is because they turn their backs to each other and look in opposite directions” (1972:31).

³⁶ The field of ethnopsychology has expressed similar concerns with addressing the cultural particulars of individual psychological symbols (see White 1992).

³⁷ This accommodation has also allowed anthropologists to discover individual motivations in collective cultural symbols. Some anthropologists, such as Edmund Leach, have argued that “public cultural symbols have no unconscious motivational significance for the individual or the group. By contrast, private symbols may involve deep motivation, but they have no cultural significance” (Obeyesekere 1981:13). Obeyesekere (1981:13) has identified two basic types of psychological symbols: personal symbols in which deep motivation is present and psychogenetic symbols where deep motivation is absent.

While culture was considered the apposite province of anthropologists, religion had to be wrested away from the tyrannical control of theologians.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant began this process in his seminal work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant famously proposed:

I do not at all share the opinion which certain excellent and thoughtful men...have so often been led to express, that we may hope sometime to discover conclusive demonstrations of the two cardinal propositions of our reason – that there is a God, and that there is a future life. On the contrary, I am certain that this will never happen. [1929:595]

Kant's fundamental proposition, which has remained scientifically incontrovertible to this day, allowed social scientists the means to escape becoming bogged down in the quagmire of unverifiable *truth claims* made by religious participants.³⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach, another German philosopher, took this proposal one step further in his *The Essence of Christianity*. While searching for the anthropological essence of religion, Feuerbach (1854) proposed that religions were clearly created by the communities devoted to them and that conceptions of god were developed as an imaginative external projection of individual human qualities.³⁹ Feuerbach's arguments, which were at least partly responsible for his failure to attain an official academic appointment, paved the way for social scientists to investigate religious formulations as human creations.⁴⁰

These proposals, that religiously informed imaginaries were humanly created and not divinely mandated or unassailably sacred, cleared the way for the social and

³⁸ Kant also asserted the converse argument, that "there will never be anyone who will be able to assert the *opposite* with the least show [of proof], much less, dogmatically. For since he could prove this only through pure reason, he must undertake to prove that a supreme being, and the thinking subject in us [viewed] as pure intelligence, are *impossible*" (1929:595).

³⁹ While Johann Kaspar Schmidt, writing under his *nom de plume* Max Stirner, was correct to critique Feuerbach for his vacillating atheism, Feuerbach's general line of argument remains relevant to the anthropological investigation of religious practices.

⁴⁰ Another important historical text from this era is Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, written from 1793-1794, which "marks almost the first time that frank contempt for organized religion was openly expressed" (Hitchens 2007:268).

psychological investigation of religious practices. These investigations were initiated by the same analysts, Durkheim, Marx, and Freud, responsible for founding the social sciences. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), who echoed Feuerbach's thesis in his well-known statement, "If religion generated everything that is essential in society, this is because the idea of society is the soul of religion" (2001:314), investigated the ways religion increased social solidarity and the challenges it faced in modern, industrializing communities. Karl Marx (1818-1883), whose analysis of socioeconomic alienation started with an investigation of religion wrote, "The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism" (1978:53).⁴¹ Marx, in contradistinction to Durkheim, believed that religious organizations and their leaders were not purveyors of social solidarity, but of social, economic, and political inequality. Sigmund Freud outlined the most comprehensive inquiry into religiously informed motivations for both individuals and collectives, motivations he saw as beginning in infantile illusions and contributing to adult neuroses.⁴²

The proposition that religions were human creations also allowed some early evolutionary anthropologists to read their own ethnocentricities into the religious

⁴¹ While Marx's religious criticisms were instrumental in understanding the social, economic, and political role of religious organizations and participants, I believe that he overlooked the power of religion by too quickly dismissing it as a "false" phenomenon. As Marx explains, "It is the task of history, therefore, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, is to unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form. Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics" (Marx 1978:54). Yet this "other-world of truth" has never vanished and this statement clearly discounts the profound influence religions continue to effect on people today.

⁴² Odilon De Mello Franco has outlined Freud's basic theory of religion as found in *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion*, and *Civilization and its Discontents*. He explains, "Freud's basic postulates can be summed up as follows: (1) God is an invention of man; (2) the origins of the religious attitude can be traced back very clearly to the feelings of infantile helplessness; (3) the image of God results solely from the child's relationship with the father and is a precipitate of the oedipal conflicts and their consequent drive renunciations, so that it is in the superego that we shall encounter the image of God, which has replaced and transformed that of the father; (4) religious ideas do not constitute precipitates of experience or end-results of thought, but are illusions, productions of the oldest, strongest and most pressing wishes of mankind" (Franco 1998:114).

formulations of other cultures. The two most notable “armchair anthropologists” mentioned earlier, E.B. Tylor and James Frazer, believed that a society’s stage of material and technological advancement was reflected in their religious conceptions and establishments. Tylor (1958) likened participants in what he termed “primitive” religions to little children who had not yet acquired the levels of complexity present in the monotheistic traditions of his own society. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* is similarly replete with theories of cultural evolutionism in which he characterizes the religious practices of other cultures as “stupid actions” (Wittgenstein 2002).

Some of the first anthropologists and social scientists in the contemporary period, such as Franz Boas, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, vocally criticized the evolutionists for their employment of ethnocentric dichotomies, such as primitive/modern, and unverified stages of religious development, which they erroneously believed ascended from “simplistic” animism to “complex” monotheism. Wittgenstein, writing in 1931, took Frazer to task for presenting the religious practices of other cultures as mistakes. Wittgenstein explained that while people may cease performing a specific action after being informed they are in error, “This is not how it is in connection with the religious practices of a people; and what we have here is *not* an error” (2002:86). In an attempt to combat these reductionisms, anthropologists desperately sought to discover the benefits for participants of more “traditional” religions.

Structuralism, à la Lévi-Strauss, and Geertz’s symbolic anthropology provided some important anthropological insights into religious practices. Geertz, who conducted extensive fieldwork in Southeast Asia and North Africa, advocated studying religious practices in their specific ethnographic contexts. As he explains, “The nature of the bias religion gives to ordinary life varies with the religion involved, with the particular dispositions induced in the believer by the specific conceptions of

cosmic order he has come to accept” (Geertz 1973:122). Geertz also attempted, like so many anthropologists of his day, to unearth the similarities between “primitive” and “complex” religious practices. As Geertz explains, “The concern with intractable ethical paradox, the disquieting sense that one’s moral insight is inadequate to one’s moral experience, is as alive on the level of so-called primitive religion as it is on that of the so-called civilized” (1973:106). Anthropologists felt that by pointing out the ways in which disparate religious traditions were similar, they had addressed their own ethnocentricities by attempting to suture the gap between the cosmologies of their own culture and those they studied.

Yet just as anthropological theory from the 1960s to the 1980s underwent major changes, anthropologists studying religion became increasingly concerned with their postcolonial heritage and started self-reflexively questioning their definitions of fundamental terms such as “religion” and “belief.” Talal Asad, one of the champions of these postcolonial investigations, demonstrated that Geertz’s well-known and widely employed definition of religion unintentionally carried a Christian bias.⁴³ Asad explains:

Thus, what appears to anthropologists today to be self-evident, namely that religion is essentially a matter of symbolic meanings linked to ideas of general order (expressed through either or both rite and doctrine), that it has generic functions/features, and that it must not be confused with any of its particular historical or cultural forms, is in fact a view that has a specific Christian history. [2002:122]

Asad (2002:116) pushed this proposal one step further and argued that because each religious tradition has its own specific history, there cannot be a universal definition of religion. This concern with ethnocentrically biased religious terminology has since

⁴³ Geertz’s definition of religion reads as follows, “A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (1973:90).

been raised by other postcolonial anthropologists (see Lavenda and Schultz 2003:68-70) who advocate employing terms such as “traditional religion,” instead of animism or naturism, and eschewing expressions such as “supernatural” because, they argue, these terms unfairly apply the dichotomy of natural/supernatural prevalent in Western societies.

Many of these postcolonial critiques are both valid and worthwhile. In particular, as Michael Lambek has illuminated, the desperate attempt to draw analogies between Christian and traditional religions, while well-intentioned, is often ethnocentrically motivated. Lambek explains, “If some early anthropologists saw Christianity as the only ‘true’ religion, the response that other religions could be equal or equivalent carried its own ethnocentric bias – namely the assumption that religions were to be recognized by their similarities, substantive or analogical, to Christianity” (2002:10). In addition to combating the harmful legacy of evolutionary and colonial analyses, anthropologists also struggled with the arguments of secularization theorists.

Some early (Marx 1978; Comte 1974; Durkheim 2001) and contemporary (Berger 1967; Cox 1966) social scientists have predicted, or called for, the imminent collapse of religion as populations increasingly rely on scientific knowledge and expertise. Yet much to their chagrin, this disintegration of the devout has still not occurred. While many of the most vocal proponents of secularization theory have since reversed their positions to become postsecularists, demonstrated by Peter Berger’s edited volume *The Desecularization of the World* (1999) and Harvey Cox’s *Religion in the Secular City* (1984),⁴⁴ they have been replaced by neo-secularists and secular humanists. Neo-secularists (Chaves 1994; Yamane 1997) propose that while levels of religious participation have remained stable in industrialized nations such as

⁴⁴ Cox (1984) proposed that religion in the West owes its resurgence to grassroots and fundamentalist movements, liberation theology, and Pentecostalism. Berger (1999) has recently proposed that humankind’s innate desire to participate in transcendence is best served by religious participation.

the United States,⁴⁵ the overall strength of religious authority has diminished. Secular humanists (Dennett 2006; Kurtz 2006; Dawkins 2006; Hitchens 2007),⁴⁶ often identified as secularists or Humanists, are non-religious – or anti-religious – advocates of a philosophy that is committed to rational, scientifically based investigation of all ideologies in a search for objective and ethical truths which can be responsibly employed to make this world a more tolerant and habitable location.

Most anthropologists, of course, have said that they refuse to take sides in universal debates about the inherent helpfulness or harmfulness of social structures such as religion.⁴⁷ Yet even a cursory glance at introductory anthropological investigations of religion reveals a grossly misbalanced perspective. The authors of *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* list four reasons why religion is important in human society: it allows participants to deal with uncertainties they feel are out of their control, provides meaning to people's lives, gives answers to life's unanswerable questions, and helps to create social solidarity among its participants (Lavenda and Schultz 2003:69). Yet these same authors have not deigned to include even one reason why religion may be harmful to these same participants.

I contend that because anthropologists of the postcolonial and postmodern persuasion have pushed back too hard against their respective demons of bias, they have produced biased analyses themselves. Anthropologists like Lambek have

⁴⁵ As Lynn Schofield Clark explains, "More recently, numerous studies have shown that overall levels of religious involvement (including subjective reports of levels of belief, personal prayer, and religious experience) remain strong in the United States – and have actually been relatively stable over the last century" (2003:5).

⁴⁶ Marx similarly calls for the annulment of religion (and private property) explaining, "Only through the annulment of this mediation – which is itself, however, a necessary premise – does positively self-deriving humanism, positive humanism, come into being" (Marx 1978:121).

⁴⁷ Geertz has famously proposed that to truly understand religion one must not become complicit with either the village preacher or village atheist, focusing instead on the social and psychological implications of particular religious practices. "And when that is done, overall questions about whether religion is 'good' or 'bad,' 'functional' or 'dysfunctional,' 'ego strengthening' or 'anxiety producing,' disappear like the chimeras they are, and one is left with particular evaluations, assessments, and diagnoses in particular cases" (Geertz 1973:123).

unfortunately proposed, “With respect to the ideas and practices of those we study, we can be skeptical about specific religious objects or arguments, but not about the idioms or acts through which they are evidently constructed” (2002:12). Why can anthropologists address religious arguments, but not the acts through which they are constructed (particularly when these acts harm children too young to share the guilt of complicity)? While one-sided anthropological investigations of religious practices may have once been forgivable as a response to evolutionary and ethnocentrically biased analyses of religion, these narrow and prejudiced examinations now seem irresponsible. Postcolonial anthropologists have also somehow come to the conclusion that there is a rational West out there. Yet is this really the case? This nexus of rationality is certainly not located among the population of the United States, which twice elected a religious fundamentalist as its president and recently built a Creationist museum,⁴⁸ or in the United Kingdom, which created its own state-sponsored creationist schools.⁴⁹

Secular humanists, on the other hand, have focused solely on the ways that religion can be harmful, while including a scalding critique of anthropology’s apathetical stance towards religious participation. Christopher Hitchens has proposed that there are four indisputable objections to religious faith: “That it wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos, that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism, that it is both the result and the cause of dangerous sexual repression, and that it is ultimately grounded on wish-thinking” (2007:4). Secular humanists also believe that religious observations should obtain the same level of scrutiny as all other humanly created

⁴⁸ Hedges (2006:113-114) provides a description of this 50,000-square-foot Creation Museum which is located in Petersburg, Kentucky.

⁴⁹ After a discussion of the Creationist “Vardy” schools in England Dawkins proposes, “Diversity may be a virtue, but this is diversity gone mad” (2006:334).

ideologies. As Richard Dawkins explains, “A widespread assumption, which nearly everybody in our society accepts...is that religious faith is especially vulnerable to offence and should be protected by an abnormally thick wall of respect, in a different class from the respect that any human being should pay to any other” (2006:20).⁵⁰

In their investigations of religious beliefs, secular humanists have also raised the point that in some situations, taking a culturally relativistic stance towards certain religious practices may be mildly – or grossly – irresponsible. I have identified three arguments from secular humanists which chart a continuum of culturally relativistic apathy. Chris Hedges, in his critical investigation of Christian fundamentalists, sums up the first position explaining, “The Christian Right attacks ‘cultural relativism,’ the creed that there is no absolute good and that all value systems have equal merit – even as it benefits, in a final irony, from the passivity of people who tolerate it in the name of cultural relativism” (2006:34). Dawkins (2006:331) writes of the Amish and their choice to raise their children in what he calls a “seventeenth-century time-warp.” He explains:

The same tendency to glory in the quaintness of ethnic religious habits, and to justify cruelties in their name...is the source of squirming internal conflict in the minds of nice liberal people who, on the one hand, cannot bear suffering and cruelty, but on the other hand have been trained by postmodernists and relativists to respect other cultures no less than their own. [Dawkins 2006:328-329]

And finally, Hitchens, expressing his outrage over the lack of any significant secular or religious opposition to the violence against those associated with the cartooned image of Muhammad originally published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, proposes, “To the ignoble motive of fear one must add the morally lazy practice of relativism: no group of nonreligious people threatening and practicing violence would

⁵⁰ Dawkins (2006:156-157) poignantly writes that he has been labeled too “19th century” by his colleagues for his pointed interrogations of those who publicly profess religious beliefs.

have been granted such an easy victory, or had their excuses – not that they offered any of their own – made for them” (2007:281). While secular humanists are wrong, an anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research in any of the previously outlined situations would be free to criticize Christian, Amish, or Islamic fundamentalists, it is disturbing that anthropological analyses of religion have become synonymous with apathy.⁵¹

I propose that an accommodation of these perspectives, postcolonial and secular humanist, will be most effectual in my attempt to understand why religious participation and conceptions of the afterlife are so important to the organizations and individuals who participate in and hold them. Therefore, I will concurrently investigate the ways in which these organizations and conceptions can be helpful and harmful. Secular humanists have been instrumental in pointing out the ways that religion has escaped vigorous criticism in this contemporary era. As Dawkins asks, “Why shouldn’t we comment on God, as scientists?” (2006:55) and “What expertise can theologians bring to deep cosmological questions that scientists cannot?” (2006:56).⁵² While secular humanists have reinvigorated discussions of religion, their antipathy towards anthropological studies seems to stem, at least in part, from their frustration that they cannot employ these ethnographies in defense of their anti-religious polemics. The conclusive and universal statement condemning all religious practice that secular humanists desire is something which anthropologists will never offer.

This antipathy towards religion has also blinded secular humanists from the ways in which religious conceptions can serve to illuminate the desires, hopes, and

⁵¹ Apathy is certainly not a problem restricted just to the field of anthropology. As Hedges explains, “Liberal institutions, seeing tolerance as the highest virtue, tolerate the intolerant” (2006:34).

⁵² As I stated earlier, it seems that anthropologists have all the tools needed to address this unbalanced perspective by focusing on the specific religious practices in question and employing Sangren’s “realist epistemology” to responsibly critique these practices as outsiders.

fears of communities and individuals and, in some situations, help them to attain these desires, maintain their hopes, and assuage their fears.⁵³ Hitchens proposes, “It is surprising how petty some of the ‘supernatural’ miracles now seem. As with spiritualist séances, which cynically offer burlblings from the beyond to relatives of the late deceased, nothing truly interesting is ever said or done” (2007:140). This pessimistic pronouncement is correct in its assessment that nothing *supernatural* will be revealed in a spiritualist séance, but discounts the fact that something interesting may be learned about the social and psychological worlds of the participants involved. Lambek sums up the attempt by anthropologists, who are as aware as secular humanists that religious conceptions are humanly created, to convey the importance of these practices to their participants. He explains, “Good anthropology understands that religious worlds are real, vivid, and significant to those who construct and inhabit them and it tries, as artfully as it can, to render those realities for others, in their sensory richness, philosophic depth, emotional range, and moral complexity” (Lambek 2002:4-5).

In my second chapter, I will attempt to apply this theoretical accommodation of practice theory and psychoanalysis while incorporating both postcolonial and secular humanist perspectives. It is my hope that in the employment of these heuristics I can form a more comprehensive image of how religious conceptions of the afterlife reduce and enhance collective concerns and individual desires.

⁵³ Hitchens condescendingly proposes, “Scientists have an expression for hypotheses that are utterly useless even for learning from mistakes. They refer to them as being ‘not even wrong.’ Most so-called spiritual discourse is of this type” (2007:202).

CHAPTER 2

ANTHROPOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE

While anthropologists have devoted much of their attention to death (Agamben 1991; Bloch and Parry 1982; Zaleski 1995; Hertz 1960) and mortuary ritual (Bloch and Parry 1982; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Stephen 1998), they have said relatively little about formulations of the afterlife. Most of the academic work focused on these conceptions has been completed by historians (Segal 2004; Bernstein 1993; Turner 1993; Johnston 2002; McGrath 2003; Le Goff 1984; Himmelfarb 1983), generally interested in the origin, transmission, and development of ideas of the afterlife. I will attempt to address this hiatus by beginning with an investigation of the various ways anthropologists have explored formulations of the afterlife and the collective repercussions that these conceptions carry. I will then provide a detailed examination of how religious formulations of the afterlife reduce and enhance individual desires.

Maurice Godelier (1999:27) has outlined three distinct, yet interconnected, social spheres: imaginary, symbolic, and real. While historians tend to focus on real events and anthropologists concentrate on the symbolic, the influence of the imaginary sphere has gone unnoticed. Anthropologists have overlooked the social and cultural influence of formulations of the afterlife for a variety of reasons, often assuming that these conceptions are outside of their purview or that they operate unlike other ideologies and are thus not examinable. Many existing formulations of the afterlife were conceived long ago. As discussed in chapter one, anthropologists are hesitant to investigate the origins of cultural customs (see Obeyesekere 1981:15), a practice that can lead to a morass of missing historical information and subsequent speculation. Anthropologists are also hesitant to explore universal phenomenon, preferring instead

to focus on the particular.⁵⁴ While those like Geertz (1973:123) are quick to dismiss universal questions like whether religion is functional or dysfunctional, ego strengthening or anxiety producing, it does seem worthwhile to explore how conceptions of the afterlife can serve these specific functions. Anthropologists like Asad have also argued that religion is “a distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other” (2002:115).⁵⁵ In some sense this is true, religious participants make claims distinctive in form and function from those of other ideologies. Yet as Franco explains, when we interact with the external world as individuals, “The kind of illusion we use – science, religion or whatever – is indicative of our personal history and the transitional space created by each of us between our objects and ourselves” (1998:115). Conceptions of the afterlife should be investigated as the socially constructed ideologies they are.⁵⁶

I am also interested in exploring the detailed machinations of conceptions of the religious afterlife for personal reasons. In selecting this topic, I am aware of Bourdieu’s call for self-reflexivity and Henrietta Moore’s reminder, “We do not spend enough time attending to the fantasies and imaginative images of the anthropologists themselves” (1994:6). I must admit, my motivation for pursuing a more detailed understanding of the Chinese afterlife is due in part to the fact that I was raised in a

⁵⁴ While this is certainly a valid point, and why I have chosen to devote the bulk of my dissertation to exploring specific Chinese conceptions of the afterlife, it seems that some questions of a universal nature related to conceptions of the afterlife can be responsibly addressed. For an excellent discussion of why theories are necessary in the social scientific investigation of religious practices see Segal’s article “All Generalizations are Bad: Postmodernism on Theories” (2006).

⁵⁵ As I discussed in chapter one, some scholars have unfortunately taken this “distinction” of religious practices as pretext that they should be excused from the same rigors of analysis to which other ideologies are subjected.

⁵⁶ I am not arguing that these religious ideologies are any less correct than any other political, economic, or social ideologies, although I do think that they have fewer claims to truth than ideologies based (at least in part) on scientific hypotheses. Hitchens’ proposal, “If one must have faith in order to believe something, or believe *in* something, then the likelihood of that something having any truth or value is considerably diminished,” (2007:71) works as aptly for any type of non-empirically based ideology. Of religious ideologies, I would only like to be free to ask, as Freud did when he conducted an investigation of these phenomena, “What is their real worth?” (1962:25).

strictly religious household in which *Homo mortuus* played an integral part. In my subsequent rejection of these guilt-filled Christian traditions, I may have unconsciously chosen to study a version of the afterlife radically different from my own, often so outlandish I am comfortable it cannot exist. This allows me to feel secure in denouncing the representations of the afterlife with which I am more intimately familiar (although unconsciously, I am sure they still scare me to death). Because of my personal experience with Christian conceptions of the afterlife, a familiarity likely shared by at least some of my English-speaking audience, I have chosen to supplement my theoretical arguments in this chapter with examples from Christian traditions.

Among contemporary Christians, there are an enormous range of beliefs in the afterlife. These conceptual disparities occur between members of different denominational affiliations and sometimes even between individuals of the same faith.⁵⁷ Despite these disparities, there have been some definable trends in Christian conceptions of the afterlife over the last twenty years (Leland 2003). These trends include: an increasingly personalized heaven, which reflects our contemporary culture's obsession with individualism,⁵⁸ consumption, comfort, and entertainment; a disappearing belief in hell, prompted by the focal shift in Christianity from suffering to healing⁵⁹ and members' growing multicultural exposure and sympathies⁶⁰; and the

⁵⁷ For an excellent and in-depth investigation of historical Western conceptions of the afterlife see Segal (2004), who documents that beliefs in the afterlife are not universal and are clearly shaped by the social surroundings of those who hold them.

⁵⁸ Sociologists such as Philip Hammond (1992) have identified this trend with a rise in what he terms "personal autonomy" (Clark 2003:8).

⁵⁹ As Asad explains, "What the Christian believes today about God, life after death, the universe, is not what he believed a millennium ago – nor is the way he responds to ignorance, pain, and injustice the same now as it was then. The medieval valorization of pain as the mode of participating in Christ's suffering contrasts sharply with the modern Catholic perception of pain as an evil to be fought against and overcome as Christ the Healer did. That difference is clearly related to the post-Enlightenment secularization of Western society and the moral language which that society now authorizes" (2002:125).

talking dead, evidenced in television shows such as John Edward's "Crossing Over" and proliferated by an increasing lack of knowledge concerning specific religious traditions.⁶¹

Despite this contemporary transformation of otherworldly beliefs, many evangelical and extremist⁶² Christians still believe in an afterlife which includes an exclusive heaven and inclusive hell, where the unsaved or unrighteous will receive violent retribution for their sins.⁶³ The comments of Ann Graham Lotz, president of Angel Ministries and daughter of televangelist Billy Graham, are indicative of these organizations. She proposes that while some ministers have neglected to include hell in their sermons, "Jesus mentioned hell more than he did heaven. We need to be reminded, because a lot of people are going there" (Leland 2003). Evangelical and extremist formulations of hell are generally informed by biblical verses which have been embellished in fiery sermons by early American ministers, such as Jonathan Edwards (1741), and contemporary pastors, such as Billy Graham. The Old and New Testament say little about hell, mentioning that some will awake from death "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2), those who commit evil deeds will be thrown by angels "into a furnace of fire [where] there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth"

⁶⁰ Leland (2003) references a 1997 poll by Barna Research in which 34 percent of born-again Christians responded with their view that people could attain access to heaven by their good works, regardless of their specific beliefs.

⁶¹ This trend is linked to an increase in individualism when, as Clark explains, "Teens, like their parents and other adults today, do not seem to be very interested in learning about ultimate truths from authoritative sources like the Bible or religious traditions. They consider *themselves* to be the ultimate authority on what it might mean for them to be religious or spiritual" (2003:9).

⁶² I have chosen to use the term "extremist" over "fundamentalist" because there is often little which can be labeled "fundamental" about the way these organizations choose to interpret their primary, scriptural sources.

⁶³ Segal (2007) explains that while the number of Americans who believe in the afterlife is nearly 90 percent, the number who believes in hell has remained constant only in evangelical and fundamentalist communities. Contemporary Christians who do ascribe to formulations of hell occasionally believe that it is a spiritual, not physical or material, punishment which is incurred by the conscious rejection of God's grace. The eternal nature of these punishments is also questioned by Universalists, who believe that all are saved in the end, and those who believe in annihilationism, a philosophy which posits that all wicked souls are destroyed.

(Matthew 13:42), and “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15) where the evil are “tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

The King James Bible likewise reveals little about heaven. Heaven is said to be the location where angels reside (Genesis 28:12) and God’s throne is located (Psalms 11:4). The Book of Revelation in the New Testament speculates that the earth will one day be turned into a new paradise⁶⁴ where there will be no pain, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4) in a city made of gold and jasper, covered in precious gems, with streets of solid gold (Revelation 21:18-21), whose gates are always open (Revelation 21:25), and is illuminated by the light of God (Revelation 21:23). Contemporary American visions of heaven are more revealing of the culture in which we currently live than the biblical verses from which they originate. Segal explains:

We have given up old notions of sitting on clouds playing harps, cartoon versions of singing the praises of God, which was so much more eloquently visualized by Dante in the Middle Ages. Instead we seem to want to go to an eternal retirement village. We want strong bodies and whole limbs and robust health, which we intend to use to full potential in sports and games, as well as theater, concerts, and even humor. [2007]

The dearth of primary information about both heaven and hell in Christian religions, often seemingly interpreted at random, has allowed both ministers and supporters to imaginatively emboss these notions of the afterlife with their personal concerns and desires.

While it is a simple matter to say that religious formulations of the afterlife reflect individual desires and personal concerns, are complicit in reducing aggressive urges and the individual pain, suffering, and ambiguities of everyday life, and promote social solidarity and humanistic attitudes; is this really the case, and how do these

⁶⁴ For an etymological history of the word paradise see Jan Bremmer (2002:109-119) where the Greek *paradeisos*, which is derived from the Median *paridazeza* “enclosure,” is said to refer to secluded to royal parks.

formulations facilitate these collective and individual outcomes? I will investigate both collective and individual motivations for creating, maintaining, and participating in otherworldly imaginaries while attempting to create a theoretical model which accounts for the potential benefits and harm caused by formulations of the afterlife.

Collectivities and Conceptions of the Afterlife

Anthropologists have focused predominately on a collective perspective when investigating conceptions of the afterlife. Durkheim (2001:47) initiated an essential postulate by reclaiming the origins of the soul and the religious afterlife as social, dismissing theories which claimed that these representations originated as animism, the bifurcation of consciousness in dream and its objectification, or naturism, the sense of infinite space and superior power imparted by the natural world. Durkheim submits, “Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities” (2001:11).⁶⁵ Durkheim builds from a discussion of the archetypal soul, imagined as immortal spirit (2001:206), to a basic outline of the role of the afterlife as the perpetuate of society explaining, “For while the group is not immortal in the absolute sense of the word, it none the less outlives individuals and is reborn and reincarnated in every new generation” (2001:199). Yet Durkheim leaves us with a *raison d'être* for the creation and the persistence of the afterlife that is too simplistic, the perpetuation of the social. This explanation neglects both collective and individual motivations for participants to produce and play within the bounds of a religious formulation that must have, as evidenced by its ubiquity, given something more substantial in return.

This line of inquiry, the afterlife and reciprocity, leads us to the nature of the afterlife and its function for Durkheim’s nephew, Marcel Mauss. Fittingly, Mauss’s

⁶⁵ Although these realities were placed within the problematic rubric of totemism (see Lévi-Strauss 1962), this does not diminish their importance: that religion and its representations are immanently social.

(1990:10) theory of the gift and *hau*, the spirit found within each gift that animates reciprocity, was itself gifted from the afterlife by the deceased Robert Hertz (1960).⁶⁶ The afterlife appears within a discussion of Mauss's fourth type of gift, presents made to the gods, where he explains, "One of the first groups of beings with which men had to enter into contract, and who, by definition, were there to make a contract with them, were above all the spirits of the dead and of the gods" (1990:16). Mauss provides two reasons, material and psychological, for the collective creation and maintenance of the afterlife. These positive social outcomes include the prestige, wealth, and rank that arise from participation in negative rites such as sacrifice to the gods (1990:16) and the individual benefits occur in the favors and sense of peace thought to be contracted from the realm of the dead (1990:17). The insightful critiques leveled against Mauss's conception of *hau* as supernatural (see Lévi-Strauss 1987; Godelier 1999) apply equally to his notions of the afterlife, as he erroneously proposes in discussion of spirits that, "It is they who are the true owners of the things and possessions of this world" (1990:16). Mauss also leaves us wondering why society was ever indebted to, or began its exchange with, the gods of the afterlife in the first place. Yet Mauss's theories of interaction and imagined reciprocity between this world and formulations of the afterlife properly extends the function of the afterlife from mere perpetuate of society to the resolution – on many levels – of both collective concerns and individual desires.

Lévi-Strauss, who pointedly critiqued Mauss for his mystical portrayal of the gift, proposes a different origin of society and its conceptions of the afterlife, the capacity to produce symbols. Stretching Saussurian linguistics, Lévi-Strauss suggests that magic, witchcraft, and mythic conceptions of the afterlife arise from the linguistic inability to signify everything, leaving an unsignified or "floating signifier" (1987:63).

⁶⁶ See Siegel (2006:7) for an analysis of this exchange.

Lévi-Strauss begins on the right track when he acknowledges the psycho-social power that accompanies notions of the afterlife – the basis for the shaman’s ability to kill – proposing, “Physical integrity cannot withstand the dissolution of the social personality” (1963:168). The social assimilation of inexpressible or individual experiences is facilitated through shamanic journeys to the afterlife which provide bewildered individuals with a “new system of reference” (1963:184) that Lévi-Strauss believes, “is the only means of objectivizing subjective states, of formulating inexpressible feelings, and of integrating inarticulated experiences into a system” (1963:172). Lévi-Strauss proposes that sacred myths and symbols become significant in their ability to link individuals to a collective by dissolving the barriers between subjective and objective, thought and object, conscious and unconscious where, “we can enter into a kind of immortality” (1969:16). Yet this immortal realm of symbol and myth, a Lévi-Straussian afterlife, is inadequate in its reduction of desire to a binary opposition that centers on the phallus – a desire whose drives he falsely believes can be reconciled through its rudimentary resolution – and in his idealist proposal that signifiers can be devoid of meaning or that symbols can exist in a pure state.

Maurice Godelier (1999) rescues these initial ideas of the afterlife from Durkheim’s simplicity, Mauss’s mysticism, and Lévi-Strauss’s idealism by formulating a theory of the sacred and formulations of afterlife that successfully accounts for their origins in the social imagination, the reciprocal benefits that their creation and maintenance imparts, and their mediation and satisfaction of collective concerns and individual desires. For Godelier, Durkheim’s statement that society is the source of conceptions of the afterlife is not sufficient as, “It also has to be shown that the sacred conceals something from the collective and individual consciousness,

something contained in social relations, something essential to society” (1999:173).⁶⁷ This concealment occurs within the mythic representations of society’s origins, where real humans are substituted with imaginary duplicates of themselves, a substitution that also occurs in representations of the afterlife, where deceased humans are replaced with representations of themselves. Godelier proposes that the formulation of a mythic origin or afterlife, built on misrecognition, was necessary for society’s genesis and continuation:

It is society as a whole which transcends individuals and provides them with the material and cultural conditions for their existence, that is the prime source, the origin, because this obliterating of real humans and replacing them with imaginary beings, this repressing beyond consciousness of the active role of man in the origins of society, this forgetting of the presence of man at the origin, is necessary in order to produce and reproduce society. [1999:172]

Once again, we are at the point where a more complex motivation than just the perpetuation of society is necessary for collectives and individuals to create and participate in these imaginaries of the afterlife.

Godelier provides a more complex reason for the production and reproduction of representations of the afterlife, power, while avoiding the pitfalls of Mauss’s analysis, mysticism. Godelier (1999:186) explains that in these processes of misrecognition, some individuals, thought to be descendants of the gods, are able to claim and exploit their relationships with the supposed residents of the afterlife in order to mitigate the threat of collective dissent. This analysis has also answered one of the mysteries of the afterlife left to us by Mauss in his explanation of why human society has established a sacred realm to which people feel indebted. Godelier (1999:172) explains that the invention of sacred origins legitimizes the social order by mystifying human agency, the driving force and power behind collectivities, as favors

⁶⁷ As Slavoj Žižek explains, this misrecognition is essential to the formation of society as, “If we come to ‘know too much’, to pierce the true functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself” (1989:21).

from the gods to which all members of society have an obligation to preserve and maintain. Godelier explains that to participate in the creation or promulgation of representations of the sacred or afterlife “is to be in possession of part of the powers of these mightier-than-human beings, it is to satisfy a desire for power, to show one’s will to control the forces that govern men” (1999:175).

In a rebuttal to Lévi-Strauss’s idealism, Godelier proposes that mythic representations of the afterlife are “not symbols in their pure state, signifiers devoid of signification; they are signifiers full of signification, gorged with meaning, at once presenting and disguising the content of social relations, stating that the order should prevail in society” (1999:174). Because these signifiers, used to construct collective imaginaries, are pregnant with signification, formulations of the afterlife assist in the conversion of individuals into social beings by allowing them to express the individually inexpressible within a socially endorsed medium. Godelier explains, “This process of occultation and metamorphosis is not only a condition for the formation of the individual as such: a singular, unique being; it is first and foremost a condition for the emergence and reproduction of the society in which this individual is born” (1999:176). While the individual adoption of collectively produced imaginaries is a necessary process in the creation of social collectivities, alienating an individual’s productive power and instilling a feeling of indebtedness to the gods in the case of imaginaries of the afterlife, Godelier fails to adequately explain why individuals choose to participate in these formulations and neglects to interrogate the ways in which personal histories influence the landscape of these imaginaries.

Before turning my attention to individuals and their interactions with formulations of the afterlife, I will briefly investigate another topic often neglected by anthropological analysis. While some of the potential benefits of collectively held conceptions of the afterlife have been discussed, none of the potential harms have

been investigated. To remedy this misbalance, I have identified and will explore two of the proposed collective benefits of religious representations of the afterlife, increased social solidarity and improved moral citizenship, and two of the possible negatives, collective exploitation and exacerbated group violence.

Possible Collective Benefits and Detriments

One of the major collective benefits of religious participation, according to anthropologists like Lavenda and Schultz (2003:69), is that participants share in an increased measure of social solidarity. A driving force behind the amplification of this solidarity is a shared formulation of the afterlife among religious adherents. As Durkheim (2001:199) has proposed, one positive collective function of the afterlife is that it serves to perpetuate society. In addition to helping members of a social collective stay together after the death of an important individual, representations of the afterlife promote solidarity by positing a collective solution to death itself.

Death is one of society's unavoidable evils. As Michel de Certeau explains, "Death is the necessary condition of evolution. The law of the species is that individuals must lose their place" (1984:197). The death of high-ranking or influential individuals, as well as the possibility of collective mortality through war or disease, can lead to a dangerously liminal social state.⁶⁸ Clark, quoting cultural critic Edward J. Ingebreetsen (1996), explains that death can introduce an "anxiety of metamorphosis" to any group. This anxiety, "a fear of possession and the loss of self, and a sense that little can be known with certainty," (Clark 2003:13) is allayed in detailed representations of the afterlife through two primary means, embracement and displacement, both of which serve to strengthen social bonds. While it is easy to see how embracing death through shared conceptions of the afterlife fosters intra-social

⁶⁸ Of this liminal state, originally conceived of by Arnold van Gennep (1969), Turner has famously declared, "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (1969:95).

alliances by outlining a predictable and hospitable otherworldly realm open only to established and authenticated group members, these conceptions also promote social solidarity by displacing fears of death.

Collective representations of the afterlife allow participants to deny the power of death through two central mechanisms: the first of which occurs when fantasy is shifted from shared optimism to supported belief. As Malinowski explains, participants can gain some measure of reassurance when they find that their abjuration of mortality is a common hope shared by others:

Death, alas, is not vague, or abstract, or difficult to grasp for any human being. It is only too hauntingly real, too concrete, too easy to comprehend for anyone who has had an experience affecting his near relatives or a personal foreboding. If it were vague or unreal, man would have no desire so much as to mention it; but the idea of death is fraught with horror, with a desire to remove its threat, with the vague hope that it may be, not explained, but rather explained away, made unreal, and actually denied. Myth, warranting the belief in immortality, in eternal youth, in a life beyond the grave, is not an intellectual reaction upon a puzzle, but an explicit act of faith born from the innermost instinctive and emotional reaction to the most formidable and haunting idea. [2002:179]

The prospect of death, in this case, serves as social cohesive to those who possess a common perspective and believe they will be reunited in a pleasant hereafter. The second denial of death occurs in the telling of these myths of immortality, successful because they displace death by localizing it elsewhere. Certeau explains that when writing or informing others about death, “I make it *the place where I am not*. Through the representation, I exorcise death, which is shut up next door, relegated to a moment that I assume is not mine” (1984:194).

The creation of collective representations of the afterlife also occurs and recurs – at least in part – because these formulations are particularly well-suited to

facilitating the move of individuals from liminality⁶⁹ to collective stability.⁷⁰ One reason that formulations of the afterlife are so appealing to individuals is that they proffer the opportunity to join a social collective and eternally enjoy the benefits of solidarity with this group. Terrence Turner provides a detailed outline of the transformation an individual undergoes when moving from liminality to stability:

The actor has in effect shifted from one set of role categories, in which he played certain roles towards other actors occupying the complementary set of role categories, to become himself an occupant of the complementary set of role categories, playing the same roles towards others as were played to him by others when he occupied the first set of roles. The actor has, from his point of view, inverted the pattern of role relations defined by the matrix. Such an inversion is a form of transformation. [1977:56]

This transformation is vividly demonstrated in representations of the afterlife which invert the position of the individual soul, purportedly tortured in hell prior to conversion, to a site of collective assembly, rewarded in paradise after conversion.⁷¹ Endorsed members of a religious solidarity are also offered the opportunity to be equally rewarded, regardless of the duration of their membership. V. Turner has called the unique nature of Christian conceptions of heaven the “perfect synthesis of *communitas* and hierarchical structure” (1969:182). This vision of paradise somehow allows for both rank and equality, appealing equally to minister and layperson, thus extending the purported solidarity shared by earthly members of a religion into the afterlife.

One of the possible detriments of increased social solidarity is a corresponding increase in collective violence. Religious organizations and conceptions of the afterlife

⁶⁹ Liminality, a state characterized by ambiguity and marked by confusion and a loss of identity, is, according to Turner, “frequently likened to death” (1969:95).

⁷⁰ As T. Turner explains, “Ritual and ceremonial behaviors develop in response to situations in which some transition, ambiguity, conflict, or uncontrollable element threatens a given structure of relations either explicitly or, simply by remaining beyond control, implicitly” (1977:60).

⁷¹ Quintus Tertullianus (c. 160-225 ACE), an early Christian leader and author, proposed that “one of the most intense pleasures of the afterlife would be endless contemplation of the tortures of the damned” (Hitchens 2007:57).

can contribute to this exacerbation of violence in two ways: first, by requiring that all members surrender at least a portion of their free will and reason,⁷² and second, by demonizing others and clothing their persecution in a sacred robe. Religious organizations, like those found in contemporary Christianity, are often closed systems which require that all members defer completely to church leadership. While this surrender of individual desires and, at times, rationality, can comfort individuals by allowing them to join a cause that portends to be greater than themselves and reduce anxieties such as the fear of death, it can also produce a membership which can be convinced to commit actions from which they would normally abstain. As Hitchens explains, “In order to be a part of the totalitarian mind-set, it is not necessary to wear a uniform or carry a club or a whip. It is only necessary to *wish* for your own subjection, and to delight in the subjection of others” (2007:232). The subjection individuals must endure to become sanctioned members of a religious organization can easily invade aspects of their life outside of church attendance. Hedges, in discussion of the hypermasculinity encouraged by extremist Christian organizations, proposes, “The domination men are encouraged to practice in the home over women and children becomes a reflection of the domination they are taught to endure outside of the home” (2006:80). This increase in violence is possible because of this loss of reason and personal power and because the violence itself is often portrayed as a member’s sacred duty.

In order to maintain increased levels of solidarity and compensate for a loss of personal power, religious organizations often demonize others. This demonization, whether it occurs on earth or in representations of hell, serves to violently reinforce the boundaries of insider versus outsider. As Hedges explains:

⁷² Voltaire has argued, “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities” (Dawkins 2006:306). Marx has echoed this statement saying, “The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself” (1978:72).

The surrender of personal power allows believers to indulge in fantasies about becoming instruments of a limitless, divine power. As the spiritual vacuum grows, as fear increases, violence in the name of God becomes not only seductive but imperative. The movement, to compensate for the loss of personal power and submission, fosters a warrior cult and feeds its hapless followers a steady diet of battles, wars and apocalyptic violence. [2006:79]

This apocalyptic violence is often associated with religious conceptions of the afterlife such as millenarianism. Millennialism,⁷³ an example of these teachings, is the belief expressed by some Christian denominations that Christ will return to earth to establish a paradise before a final judgment. Before this paradise can be established, all of those people deemed undeserving must be cleansed from the earth through violence ironically deemed “sacred.” As Hedges explains, this sacred violence, “Allows its perpetrators and henchmen to avoid moral responsibility for their crimes. The brutality they carry out is sanctified, an expression of not human volition but divine wrath. The victims, in a final irony, are considered responsible for their suffering and destruction” (2006:32).⁷⁴ While religious conceptions of the afterlife can motivate some collectives to participate in violent rhetoric and/or actions, it has also been said to motivate citizens to act morally.

Another possible collective benefit of religious participation is that a religious citizenry is said to act with superior moral judgment versus their secular counterparts (or, sometimes, just more morally than they would have otherwise). What is moral judgment? Leo Schneiderman has proposed, “The essence of moral judgment is that it defines its object as having social relevance, and seeks to restore social control in a

⁷³ This term, Latin for “one thousand years,” is part of the Three Ages philosophy borrowed by Hitler in interpretation of his Third Reich, which he believed would last one thousand years.

⁷⁴ Bertrand Russell has proposed, “Why is propaganda so much more successful when it stirs up hatred than when it tries to stir up friendly feelings? The reason is clearly that the human heart as modern civilization has made it is more prone to hatred than to friendship. And it is prone to hatred because it is dissatisfied, because it feels deeply, perhaps even unconsciously, that it has somehow missed the meaning of life, that perhaps others, but not we ourselves, have secured the good things which nature offers for man’s enjoyment” (1930:75).

situation that threatens the harmony of the group” (1979:213). This moral motivation may occur, at least in part, in representations of heaven, which promise equal rewards for all commandment-abiding members, and hell, which often guarantees painful tortures for members who are tempted to choose a heretical course of action. While representations of the afterlife may be one mode of reinforcing moral action, it is certainly not the only method and, in this contemporary era, the efficacy of formulations of the afterlife in motivating moral action has been called into question.

Moral motivation for many in contemporary American society may be driven just as much by civic accountability as religious responsibility. Harvard biologist Marc Hauser recently conducted a study which tracked participants’ answers to a series of moral decisions. At the conclusion of this experiment, the study determined that there is “no statistically significant difference between atheists and religious believers in making these judgments” (Dawkins 2006:226). Dawkins proposes that advancements in the ever-progressing moral *zeitgeist* common – though by no means ubiquitously uniform – throughout much of the industrialized world, “certainly have not come from religion” (2006:270).⁷⁵ The waning strength of proposed otherworldly punishments, previously used to secure moral conformity, is evident in the United States. A 2003 Harris poll recorded that 82 percent of Americans believe in some form of heaven, 63 percent said that they were likely to go there, and only one percent of Americans thought that they would go to hell (Leland 2003). As Segal explains, this may be a sign that morality is being informed by civic circumstance, not religious doctrine as “our views of the afterlife are adjusting to our more complicated and interesting culturally plural and multicultural society. It is harder to condemn Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist neighbors to hell, if you have found out that they are

⁷⁵ Hitchens similarly proposes that religion no longer informs moral progress as, “Religion spoke its last intelligible or noble or inspiring words a long time ago: either that or it mutated into an admirable but nebulous humanism” (2007:7).

good and loyal neighborhood friends” (2007). While representations of the afterlife may still help motivate some religious collectives to proffer moral aid and practice moral constraint, formulations of heaven and hell are increasingly scrutinized as exploitative, particularly when they are used to control children.

The possibility of collective exploitation is another overlooked detriment of religious formulations of the afterlife. Hitchens (2007:4), as outlined in chapter one, believes that religion misrepresents the origins of man and enhances exploitation. Yet how does this process of alienation and exploitation actually work? As Godelier (1999:172) has explained, mythic representations of society’s origins and conclusions feature an afterlife in which humans are substituted with imaginary duplicates of themselves. This process of replacement alienates the productive power that social collectives possess and transfers it to an imaginary realm controlled by religious leaders.⁷⁶ Hedges (2006:55) proposes that religious leaders are free to utilize this alienated power in any manner they see fit, including exploiting families, friends and communities in a competition for their undivided loyalty.⁷⁷

Formulations of the afterlife also exploit the productive powers and economic wealth of adult believers by demanding unattainable moral perfection and through the over-exaggerated depictions of reward and consequence.⁷⁸ Extremist and evangelical Christian leaders, which still demand perfect obedience from their membership in

⁷⁶ Marx’s theory of alienation and commodity fetishism was created and articulated through a similar understanding of religion. Marx explains, “There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (1978:321).

⁷⁷ Hitchens explains that while religion often acts as though it is “content with its own marvelous claims and sublime assurances. It *must* seek to interfere with the lives of nonbelievers, or heretics, or adherents of other faiths. It may speak about the bliss of the next world, but it wants power in this one” (2007:17).

⁷⁸ Weber, in discussion of the “iron cage” created by religion, proposes, “The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so” (2003:181).

action and (impossibly) in thought, can use the guilt which undeniably results from congregants mistakes to exploit their loyalty and donations. As Hitchens explains, “Urging humans to be superhumans, on pain of death and torture, is the urging of terrible self-abasement at their repeated and inevitable failure to keep the rules. What a grin, meanwhile, on the face of those who accept the cash donations that are made in lieu!” (2007:213).⁷⁹ This exploitation is also achieved through the over-exaggeration of otherworldly rewards and punishments in details which can never be verified. As Dawkins has proposed, “If hell were plausible, it would only have to be moderately unpleasant in order to deter. Given that it is so unlikely to be true, it has to be advertised as very scary indeed, to balance its implausibility and retain some deterrence value” (2006:321). While the argument can be made that religious leaders do not exploit any adults who do not wish for their own subjugation, the same cannot be said of children.

Dawkins has proposed that the exploitation of children’s naiveté, particularly when encouraging them to “believe in something like the punishment of unshriven mortal sins in an eternal hell,” (2006:318) should be labeled “child abuse.” Hitchens agrees in his proposition:

By all means let a congregation that believes in whipping out the devil choose a new grown-up sinner each week and lash him until he or she bleeds. By all means let anyone who believes in creationism instruct his fellows during lunch breaks. But the conscription of the unprotected child for these purposes is something that even the most dedicated secularist can safely describe as sin. [2007:52]

While the inculcation of moral parameters – even through the display of violent imagery and sadistic threats – may be difficult to legally prosecute or prohibit, it

⁷⁹ While Hitchens often adopts a pessimistic view of religion, Christian megachurches in the U.S. have recently been recruiting Harvard MBAs to increase attendance and profits (see Symonds 2005).

seems to me that the religiously sanctioned exploitation of children who are medically harmed or sexually abused should be stopped whenever it is discovered.

Yet philosopher Mark Sheldon (2003) contends that the decision to take legal action against adults who are mistreating children hinges on whether these actions can be defined as socially or religiously motivated. Sheldon proposes:

The difference between the case of male circumcision that is religiously based...and female circumcision that is socially based is that the issue of harm appears to be possible to address if the issue is social in nature. The world in which the issue of harm is raised is ultimately the same world for all, even if social traditions are different. If the issue is a religious practice, the world that the players inhabit might be fundamentally different and ultimately might admit of no relevant commonality that would provide a basis for comparison and evaluation. [2003:62]

Sheldon (1996) continues this line of argumentation in his discussion of Jehovah's Witnesses and their use of parental discretion to stop their own children from receiving vital blood transfusions. Sheldon argues that the question of harm becomes a matter of perspective when religious conceptions of the afterlife are introduced.

Sheldon proposes:

In the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, harm occurs when one receives a blood transfusion, not when one dies. While this might, to many, sound preposterous, the fact is that we actually do not know who is correct on this question. We might actually suffer a harm when we receive a blood transfusion – the harm of being cut off from eternal life – but not when we die physically. [2003:61]⁸⁰

This *a priori* endorsement of religious formulations of the afterlife (that somehow float above the reach of civil jurisdiction and are used to justify harmful actions) seems an irresponsible argument with potentially disastrous consequences.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Sheldon, amazingly, continues this argument with his proposal, "Furthermore, we currently have no way to settle the differing claims on this question, to determine, actually, which is right. We would have to die in order to determine an answer to the question, and, even then, our personal fate might be such that we will never be availed of a position that would enable us to answer the question" (2003:61).

⁸¹ It seems as if the next step in this argument is the proposal that the miniscule portion of Islamic fundamentalists who perform violent, terrorist acts may be correct in their actions because they want to secure for themselves a place in heaven and the path of martyrdom may be their only shot (no pun intended).

Sheldon's uncritical echoing of the circular argumentation proffered by religious participants, that their practices should be deemed irreproachable because they are religious, fails to address why religious formulations of the afterlife should be gullibly swallowed or why religious participants have a stronger claim to truth than those who commit actions which are socially motivated.⁸² While Sheldon, following Kant, is correct in his proposal that we can never empirically prove that Jehovah's Witnesses otherworldly imaginaries are accurate or inaccurate, we can conclusively prove that not allowing a child the adequate level of medical care required is inordinately cruel and that the only real and immediate benefit it carries is for the child's parents, whose bizarre eschatological system demands satisfaction.⁸³ While Dawkins has demanded that religious conceptions of the afterlife, particularly the promise of a martyr's paradise, be viewed as dangerous a weapon as "the warhorse, the tank and the cluster bomb," (2006:308) I hope only that my brief discussion of the potential collective impacts of formulations of the afterlife has shown how they can be both beneficial and harmful.

Individuals and Conceptions of the Afterlife

Why, if representations of the afterlife are *collective* fantasies, would individuals willfully produce and reproduce the socializing power and oppressive hierarchies that these representations introduce and the sublimation of desire that they mandate? Godelier similarly questions why people would accept – and even seek out – social enslavement, asking incredulously, "To what extent are [people] convinced that it is necessary to exclude, repress, metamorphose, sublimate the facts for the supreme

⁸² Sheldon's line of argumentation is exactly what Dawkins opposes when he says, "Hate only has to prove it is *religious*, and it no longer counts as hate" (2006:23).

⁸³ To echo Hitchens, it seems perfectly legitimate to allow an adult to weigh the consequences and decide whether to accept or refuse a blood transfusion, but I will not condone the religious exploitation of any child. This issue, as Hymes has proposed of all anthropology, is not merely an empirical one, "It is also a moral problem, a problem of one's commitments in, and to, the world" (1999:14).

good of all, and that the restriction of access to power (and/or wealth) to only one part of society is in the divine, supernatural order of things?” (1999:178).⁸⁴ This shock seems to stem from Godelier’s conviction that representations of the afterlife are collective, not individual. Godelier maintains, “This enchanted world and its enchanted humans do not arise from the personal, private, and unique history of each individual” (1999:176).⁸⁵

I contend that collectively held formulations of the afterlife represent and accommodate both collective concerns and individual desires. As stated in my first chapter, anthropologists like Obeyesekere (1981) have argued that collective cultural symbols can contain subjective imagery from – and unconscious significance for – individuals. Obeyesekere explains:

Subjective imagery is often protoculture, or culture in the making. While all forms of subjective imagery are innovative, not all of them end up as culture, for the latter depends on the acceptance of the subjective imagery by the group and its legitimation in terms of the larger culture. Subjective imagery, insofar as it is based on objective culture, has the potential for group acceptance, unlike fantasy or totally innovative acts, which have no prior cultural underpinnings. [1981:169-170]

While subjective imagery can end up in collectively held imaginaries,⁸⁶ most participants in otherworldly representations will not create or have a direct influence shaping these formulations. These individuals can still sate personal desires by imagining themselves into (and in control of) collective fantasies. T. Turner proposes

⁸⁴ Bourdieu (1998:1) has likewise expressed shock at what he has termed the “paradox of doxa,” that is, the broad respect given to the order of the world and the fact that there are not more transgressions against it.

⁸⁵ Other scholars have referenced the fact that some representations of paradise are not appealing to individuals. Weber writes of the “pious boredom of paradise” (2003:70) and Hitchens proposes, “Nothing proves the man-made character of religion as obviously as the sick mind that designed hell, unless it is the sorely limited mind that has failed to describe heaven” (2007:219).

⁸⁶ Michele Stephen proposes, “In my view, collective ritual practices, as well as reflecting particular forms of social relationships and cultural meanings, also reflect and draw upon unconscious fantasies. As a collective fantasy, a ritual system, like a work of art or literature, is separate from yet resonates with individual unconscious processes” (1998:1174).

that ritual collapses sociocentric and egocentric “levels of iconic representation within the same condensed symbolic vehicle. It thus provides a means of imbuing the objective, sociocentric order with the subjective meanings it encodes, and of manipulating both dimensions of meaning as a function of one another” (1977:63). T. Turner’s rich analysis of ritual can also be applied to collectively held imaginaries, which similarly collapse objective and subjective representations within one mythological *mise-en-scène*. Collectively held beliefs in the afterlife allow some individuals to imagine themselves as protagonists (or, at least, actors with significant supporting roles) on this otherworldly stage.⁸⁷

The individual creation of, and participation in, formulations of the afterlife has been approached by social scientists and psychoanalysts from two distinct perspectives: as therapeutic fantasy or infantile illusion. The possible therapeutic benefits which individuals can procure from participation in these imaginaries are a motivation of the drives through fantasies of *jouissance* and frustration, an ability to assuage life’s everyday ambiguities (including but not limited to death), and the means to provide their lives with greater meaning (not just as a member of a collective, but also through the creation of an individual spiritual narrative). The potential detriments which individuals may receive from involvement in imaginaries of the afterlife are becoming petrified in a perpetual state of childhood, distracted from more meaningful or tangible interests and problems, and increased egocentrism.

Therapeutic Fantasy

The first therapeutic benefit which can derive from individual participation in formulations of the afterlife is a motivation of individual drive. Adrian Johnston (2005), in the anti-utopian turn of contemporary psychoanalysis, purports that due to

⁸⁷ For more on the relation between collective representation and personal fantasy see Kracke and Herdt (1987).

the dual nature of the drive (*trieb*), individuals can never secure occupancy within a completely satisfactory “paradise.” Johnston (2005:149), following Freud, explains that the drive is split between the axis of iteration (source-pressure) and the axis of alteration (aim-object) and it is in this split that desires can never be realized.⁸⁸ Johnston proposes that the axis of iteration, with its real and constant demands, can never obtain satisfaction because “the representational components of the axis of alteration are subject to modification by temporal factors, a pure, undiluted repetition of the initial satisfaction sought by the axis of iteration is, strictly speaking, impossible” (2005:151).⁸⁹ The afterlife serves its first function for the individual at this juncture by maintaining tension between the axis of iteration and alteration through the ontogenic and therapeutic fantasy that full *jouissance* exists and is eminently attainable. Thus formulations of paradise can serve as the carrot on a stick which motivates individuals endlessly searching for uninhibited enjoyment.

Not surprisingly, conceptions of hell can also serve to motivate individual drive. Johnston explains that *jouissance* is delayed when the reality principle, the father’s rules or society’s laws, is “employed as a scapegoat for the dissatisfaction of the drives” (2005:298). Johnston reveals, “If ‘external’ constraints are a residual by-product of the inherent antagonism within all drives, then some form of Freudian ‘civilization,’ as a prohibitory *Umwelt* in whatever particular forms, will always be necessary so as to sustain the fantasy of full satisfaction” (2005:254). In a

⁸⁸ Johnston builds this anti-utopian foundation by employing Freud’s (1915) earlier conception of *trieb*, which locates the drive somewhere in between psyche and soma. This allows Johnston (2005:296) to propose that Freud, in his development of the Oedipus complex, missed an even earlier form of subjugation, the somatic demands of an infant’s drives. While most socio-cultural anthropologists would be hard-pressed to accept that the internal conflict within the drive occurs only as a type of objective and universal bodily conundrum, this theory can be usefully applied if we concede that the drive exists somewhere in between the biological and social. Without resorting to a sort of biological determinism or reverting to the Freud-Marxian fallacies of a pre-libidinal or pre-capitalist society, we can also maintain that it is only after the Oedipus complex – when the social subject has accepted the rule of law – that these fantasies of full *jouissance*, which are culturally not biologically constructed, need to be maintained.

⁸⁹ Thus Jacques Lacan’s formulation, *La jouissance n’existe pas* or “pure enjoyment cannot exist.”

contemporary civilization that rarely punishes – and often rewards – its citizens’ overindulgence, traditional notions of hell provide the ideal scapegoat as frustrator and delayer of the drives. That is, one can imagine that pure enjoyment could be immediately attained on earth if not for the punishments of hell, rule of the father, and laws of society. These “fantasies of frustration,” situated like a transparent but impenetrable fence in front of *jouissance*, delay the pleasure principle through the invocation of the reality principle and maintain the motivating tension between the drives.⁹⁰

The second therapeutic benefit which can be gleaned by afterlife believers is some measure of solace that, according to their eschatological imaginary, death is not the end of individual existence⁹¹ and everyday ambiguities are not for naught. Freud explains:

We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. [1961:26]

Internal anxieties, in the form of psychopathology or death, can be assuaged by formulations of the afterlife. James Hillman (1979:168) proposes that conceptions of the afterlife can be viewed from a psychological, as well as sociological, perspective. In his opinion, hell represents the “timeless repetition, amoral self-centeredness, and inherent destructiveness” (Hillman 1979:163) pathologically present within all

⁹⁰ As Johnston explains, this invocation of the reality principle maintains the tension between the drives and is necessary to avoid the complete collapse of the individual being as, “If one allowed oneself to follow completely the demands of the drive-source, the results would be devastatingly traumatic” (2005:298).

⁹¹ Carol Zaleski explains that the heroic acceptance of death has become an axiomatic attitude in modern Western societies, thanks in large part to analysts like Freud, Geoffrey Gorer (1965), and Ernest Becker (1973). Zaleski proposes, “From this viewpoint, intimations of immortality are but stratagems to evade the reality of death. Such a premise, whatever merits it may have as a moral tonic, can inhibit our appreciation for cultures and traditions that prefer to see death as a doorway to other realms” (1995:383). While I hope not to be inhibited by my secular sympathies, I also believe that an uncritical admiration for these exotic “doorways” to other realms is irresponsible.

individuals.⁹² While many psychoanalysts have viewed formulations of hell as primitive regressions, Hillman (1975:100) argues that the psyche reverts or regresses to these imaginaries both to escape reality and make sense of one's own pathologies. Religious representations of the afterlife can also serve as an outlet for this psychopathological aggression by allowing individuals to punish others by imagining them dead (see Freud 1913: 211; 1946:80; 1961:95) or in hell.

External ambiguities, natural forces of destruction and our unpredictable relations with others, can also be allayed by formulations of the afterlife. Once the gods were credited with creating humankind, they also became responsible for remedying all human misfortune (see Freud 1962:22-23). The paramount example of how otherworldly beliefs can be utilized to explain coincidental events remains Evans-Pritchard's (1979:366) hypothetical discussion of a granary collapse. Evans-Pritchard, working among the African Azande, explains that a granary may collapse and injure/kill those seated beneath it. Evans-Pritchard proposes that the most perplexing question associated with this event is not why the granary collapsed, which the Zande know generally occurs because of termite damage, or why people were seated beneath it, often to escape the heat of the sun, but, "Why should these particular people have been sitting under this particular granary at the particular moment when it collapsed?" (1979:366). Geertz explains that one answer to this question can be located within religious formulations where, "The effort is not to deny the undeniable – that there are unexplained events, that life hurts, or that rain falls upon the just – but to deny that there are inexplicable events, that life is unendurable, and that justice is a mirage" (1973:108).⁹³

⁹² Hillman explains, "Only in mythology does pathology receive an adequate mirror, since myths speak with the same distorted, fantastic language" (1975:99).

⁹³ Not only do religious formulations provide believers with the answers to internal and external ambiguities, they also provide them with the ability to react against these forces by attempting to adjure, appease, bribe, or influence the gods (see Freud 1962:20-21).

Religion, as a self-proclaimed purveyor of transcendent truths, must also explain why its participants are sometimes noticeably less successful or content than their other-denominational or secular counterparts. As Geertz explains, “The vexation here is the gap between things as they are and as they ought to be if our conceptions of right and wrong make sense, the gap between what we deem various individuals deserve and what we see that they get” (1973:106). The afterlife can be employed in these moments of ambiguity to explain that a suffering religious adherent is either paying for past mistakes (karma) or earning future rewards (paradise). Traditional religious conceptions of the afterlife also deal handily with members of society who visibly derive pleasure from breaking civil and moral laws by banishing them to the eternal punishments of hell.⁹⁴

Anthropologists (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Taussig 2002; Appadurai 1996) have written volumes about the disorienting and isolating effects of industrialization and modernity. Zaleski reveals, “Only in modern industrial societies does individualism become such an isolating force. Only now do we feel acutely that to exist as an individual is to be in peril, standing out exposed on the plain of being, an easy target for death” (1995:388). Along with this individual increase in a fear of death, industrialization has been blamed for a corresponding decrease in leisure,⁹⁵ happiness,⁹⁶ and fantasy.⁹⁷ Obeyesekere (1981:166) writes that Western, industrial societies are driven by the performance principle, which emphasizes the domination of

⁹⁴ Russell proposes that this punishment is often prompted by an “envy of those who are in a position to commit sins from which we have to abstain if we are to retain the respect of our friends” (1930:93).

⁹⁵ Russell has written, “At every moment of life the civilized man is hedged about by restrictions of impulse: if he happens to feel cheerful he must not sing or dance in the street” (1930:134).

⁹⁶ While there are a plethora of possible causes, Tal Ben-Shahar writes that within industrialized nations, “Approximately one-third of American teenagers suffer from depression. Studies in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia indicate that children today experience more anxiety and depression than children did in previous generations. This trend extends across ethnic and socioeconomic lines” (2007:59).

⁹⁷ Obeyesekere explains, “In societies dominated by the performance principle, fantasy is uniquely associated with infantile and psychotic behavior. It seems obvious that a high premium on performance must necessarily devalue fantasy and curb its expression” (1981:167).

man and an obsessive work ethic. He explains, “In a socioeconomic system governed by the performance principle, there is an early and radical repression or modification of the drives, a drastic curtailment of the pleasure principle” (Obeyesekere 1981:166). Hedges proposes that this modern isolation is responsible for the despair prevalent throughout contemporary America and an increased interest in otherworldly imaginaries:

This despair does not always rise out of severe want, the kind of want that plagues much of the developing world, or out of the immediate threat of war, but rather is the product of the disconnectedness and loss of direction that comes with living in vast, soulless landscapes filled with strip malls and highways, where centers of existence and meaning have been obliterated. It is a response to a national malaise. This despair has created, perhaps more than any other force, the opening for these utopian visionaries. [2006:49]

Formulations of the afterlife allow some individuals to overcome modern, industrial isolation by offering a symbolic link to the transcendent (see Berger 1999).⁹⁸ This permits some participants to create their own spiritual narratives (see Sangren 2000) in which they interject deep meaning into everyday, coincidental occurrences. Zaleski explains, “The common achievement of the symbolic immortalities is to offer the individual a wider cosmos within which to dwell, nourished by a rich network of social, natural, and spiritual connections. They overcome isolation and are therefore both reasonable and adaptive, rather than illusory and regressive” (1995:387). While Zaleski argues that conceptions of the afterlife should not be viewed as illusory and regressive, some psychoanalysts and social scientists have presented the strong case that formulations of the afterlife should be considered infantile illusions.

Infantile Illusion

Religious conceptions have been labeled infantile illusions, most notably by Freud, who proposes, “[Religion] is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to

⁹⁸ As Hanna Segal reminds, “The ascendance of the reality principle does not mean that phantasy is abandoned. It continues, but in the unconscious, and is expressed symbolically” (1994:396).

anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life” (1961:22). Some scholars (see Franco 1998; Zaleski 1995) argue that to call religious conceptions “infantile” is an unfair, reductive diminution of religion. Franco contends, “This simplistic, reductionistic tendency to equate belief with pathology and non-belief with normality...turns the analyst’s function into that of an ‘exorcist,’ who is supposed, through his interpretations, to free the analysand from the trammels of his belief” (1998:114). While it would be simplistic and reductionistic to dismiss religious formulations as “infantile” without proper investigation, I believe that there are at least three significant similarities between religious conceptions and infant/child development: dependence/obedience, illusion, and an early developmental stage called “splitting.”

Religions like Christianity require a spiritual dependence on otherworldly parental figures which mirrors the physical and emotional dependence of infants on their worldly parents. Freud suggests, “The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness” (1961:21). Freud (1989) proposes that the “wishful thinking” associated with religious practices begins with the infant’s call for its mother and continues in children’s games like *fort und da*.⁹⁹ The infant, who quickly learns that its cry makes the mother appear, can believe as an adult that their cry can also summon otherworldly assistance. This feeling of infantile helplessness, which Freud proposes led humankind to create god “in the figure of an enormously exalted father” (1961:22), may be as much biological

⁹⁹ Freud (1989) explains that his grandson Ernst compulsively played a game with small objects and string. Ernst would toss an object somewhere he could not see it while shouting, “Fort!” (gone) and pull it back within his line of sight shouting, “Da!” (there).

as cultural.¹⁰⁰ Weston La Barre has proposed, “Only humans have the extravagant discrepancy between large, experiencing brains and protracted, near-total dependence *on others* in their physically immature post-natal state. In this lie the roots of magic and religion” (1978:60). This infantile dependence is also inextricably tied to complete obedience. Dawkins explains:

More than any other species, we survive by the accumulated experience of previous generations, and that experience needs to be passed on to children for their protection and well-being. Theoretically, children might learn from personal experience not to go too near a cliff edge, not to eat untried red berries, not to swim in crocodile-infested waters. But, to say the least, there will be a selective advantage to child brains that possess the rule of thumb: believe, without question, whatever your grown-ups tell you. Obey your parents; obey the tribal elders, especially when they adopt a solemn, minatory tone. [2006:174]

These cultural and biological dispositions have not been ignored by religious leaders. In Christianity, for example, adherents are told they cannot enter paradise without being like a “little child” (Mark 10:15) and, as Dawkins proposes, “The Jesuit boast, ‘Give me the child for his first seven years, and I’ll give you the man,’ is no less accurate (or sinister) for being hackneyed” (2006:177).

Analysts like Freud do not consider religious conceptions to be merely infantile; these formulations are also thought to be illusions. Freud proposes of religious doctrines, “These, which are given out as teachings, are not precipitates of experience or end-results of thinking: they are illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind” (1962:38). For Freud, the projection of infantile-like wants into an unverifiable, supernatural cosmos is considered illusory because, just as the infant erroneously thinks their cry controls the mother, the religious participant speciously believes their cry controls a supernatural parent. Yet

¹⁰⁰ My inclusion of this biological argument occurs in the spirit of the “incompleteness thesis,” which argues that “the enculturative structure is as important as the nervous system that enables it” (Schwartz 1992:325).

illusions are not necessarily as derogatory as Freud makes them out to be. Franco proposes, “An illusion is not a mistake, even if it may be a false belief” (1998:115). Segal (1994:400), in discussion of two types of fantasies, experimental and delusional, explains that children frequently test the limits of the world around them through experimental and imaginative “what-if” illusions which can be discarded when these primitive hypotheses fail. Delusions, on the other hand, create an “as-if” world that is infrequently abandoned. Religious conceptions, such as the belief in a specifically structured afterlife, seem most infantile and harmful when they fall into “as-if” (belief) category of delusion instead of the “what-if” (hope) category of illusion.

The final similarity between religious conceptions and infant/child development is a developmental stage called “splitting.” Splitting, a concept originated by French psychologist Pierre M. F. Janet (1859-1947) and expanded by Freud in his discussion of *eros* and *thanatos*, is the idea that individuals polarize external and internal objects as one of two extremes: good or bad, desirable or undesirable, helpful or harmful. Melanie Klein (1882-1960), an Austrian-born psychoanalyst famous for her work with young children,¹⁰¹ argued that splitting occurred much earlier than previously imagined. Klein explains that “in the infant’s mind the mother primarily appears as good and bad breast split off from each other” (1986:53). Klein (1952) argued that infants are torn between feelings of satisfaction and pleasure when in the mother’s presence and feelings of frustration and rage when she is absent. It is during this stage that the infant, unable to perceive whole objects,

¹⁰¹ Klein’s emphasis on developmental “positions” (splitting is one example), pre- and proto-Oedipal complexes, her relaxation of Freudian gender biases, and a strict reliance on clinical research has made her psychoanalytic research more conducive to anthropological applications than that of either Freud or Lacan (see Born 1998:375). As Born argues, “The relative absence of a developmental narrative (or founding myth) is important because it means the Kleinian approach is less teleological, less encumbered with finding evidence of specific psychic-developmental dramas, and thus less saturated with cultural assumptions than Freudian and Lacanian perspectives. It is not true, then, that there is no developmental schema in the Kleinian perspective. Rather, it is less elaborate, less specific, and less enculturated than those of its rivals” (1998:375).

imaginatively splits the object of satisfaction and frustration into a good and bad breast (see Stephen 1998:1176). This object separation leads to the childhood fantasies of banishing, killing, and cannibalizing the mother, father, and siblings which Klein (1986) discovered in her “psychoanalytic play-technique.” Stephen explains that when the infant eventually becomes aware of whole objects, “A new emotional phase sets in where the child becomes overwhelmed by fears that in its desire to destroy the bad, frustrating mother, it has also destroyed the good mother” (1998:1176). This fear introduces the “depressive position” (Klein 1986), in which the infant learns to accept the ambivalence that its mother can be both good and bad, destructive urges give way to guilt, and the infant attempts to reinstate the “good mother” within its own ego. As Stephen explains, “It is only by working its way through the depressive position that the child becomes capable of loving relationships with others and is able to continue its emotional development” (1998:1176-1177).

I believe that religious conceptions of the afterlife are strikingly similar to this developmental process of splitting. In both formulations, infants and religious participants split one concept (mother and death) into two binary oppositions (good/bad breast and heaven/hell) and idealize one object while the other is maligned. When this splitting becomes extreme, it is linked with two additional mechanisms: denial and omnipotence. Born (1998:374) explains that denial can occur as the devaluation of an object or its annihilation in fantasy or practice. Just as the infant fantasizes about destroying the bad, frustrating mother, religious participants fantasize about the destruction promised to bad sinners and frustrating nonbelievers in hell. Omnipotence, another mechanism associated with splitting, occurs when good and destructive impulses are projected onto – and then introjected from – an external object. This process of “projective identification,” as Born explains, “Is marked by a loss of boundary between self and other, subject and object, a quality in which the

subject may believe her- or himself able to affect the inside of the object and make it feel something under her or his control” (1998:374). While religious conceptions can be considered similar, in some fundamental ways, to infantile illusions, I will now investigate the principle detriments associated with individual participation in formulations of the afterlife: a perpetual state of childhood, a distraction from more meaningful endeavors, and an increase in egocentrism.

Religious conceptions, particularly those related to the afterlife, can trap adults in a perpetual state of childhood or, as Freud has termed it, a permanent state of “psychical infantilism” (1961:36). Hedges proposes that this process occurs as:

The difficult task of learning how to make moral choices, how to accept personal responsibility, how to deal with the chaos of human life is handed over to God-like authority figures. The process makes possible a perpetuation of childhood. It allows the adult to bask in the warm glow and magic of divine protection. It masks from them and from others the array of human weaknesses, including our deepest dreads, our fear of irrelevance and death, our vulnerability and uncertainty. [2006:88]

Splitting is another excellent example of how religious participation can encourage a perpetual childhood state. While splitting may be necessary as an infant/child developmental stage and can recur normally in adult emotions such as mourning (see Stephen 1998:1177), it becomes harmful when encouraged as an adult defense mechanism. Religion institutionalizes a split between good and evil which may leave no room for its congregants to see that self, family, friends, and neighbors are actually one object, which feature gradations of good and evil, not two objects, comprised of either good or evil. Born explains that as one increasingly fears the persecution derived from the projection of destructive impulses into the bad object, “Ultimately the origin of persecution may become irrelevant as the subject is caught up in a phantasized frenzy of terror and, therefore, preventative and retributive destruction”

(1998:374). This reductive, childlike mindset can also cause participants to become distracted from more meaningful and tangible interests and problems.

While the appeal of religious conceptions of the afterlife is that they distract individuals from everyday discontents and injustices,¹⁰² one of their primary detriments is that they can also serve to divert attention from substantive pursuits and concerns. Freud proposes of these otherworldly imaginaries, “One can re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one’s own wishes. But whoever, in desperate defiance, sets out upon this path to happiness will as a rule attain nothing” (1961:31).¹⁰³ Nothing is attained because individuals distracted by formulations of heaven and hell often focus more on the rewards promised in an afterlife than those available in this one.¹⁰⁴ To echo Russell, “Happiness that is genuinely satisfying is accompanied by the fullest exercise of our faculties, and the fullest realization of the world in which we live” (1930:88). This distraction can quickly turn to dissatisfaction as individuals waiting to be rewarded fail to search for substantive satisfactions or transfer the responsibility for their happiness to others. As Dawkins explains, “There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else (parents in the case of children, God in the case of adults) has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point” (2006:360).

¹⁰² Of this appeal Clark proposes, “It is, of course, easier to talk of angels, aliens, and spirits of the deceased than of the increasing gap between the wealthy and the working poor in our own society, especially when there are such strongly held views regarding this gap and its causes and consequences” (2003:234).

¹⁰³ As I outlined in my earlier discussion on fantasies of frustration, the only real individual enjoyment that one can attain from representations of the afterlife is the delay of the pleasure principle through the invocation of the reality principle.

¹⁰⁴ Dawkins proposes, “More generally...one of the truly bad effects of religion is that it teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding” (Dawkins 2006:126). Dawkins also reveals that in a large survey of randomly chosen Americans, conducted by Michael Shermer and Frank Sulloway, “Religiosity is indeed negatively correlated with education (more highly educated people are less likely to be religious)” (2006:102).

Besides diverting individual attention away from the substantive satisfactions of this life and teaching participants to place responsibility for personal happiness in others' hands, Christian formulations of the afterlife also distract from one of life's most fulfilling actions, hard work. Tal Ben-Shahar explains:

Adam and Eve lived the quintessential life of leisure – they did not work and did not plan for the future. Yet when they ate the forbidden fruit, they were banished from the Garden of Eden, and they and their descendants were condemned to lives of hard work. The notion of hard work as punishment has become so embedded in our culture that we tend to depict heaven – the ideal place in which we would have the ideal life – as devoid of every hardship, including work. As it turns out, though, here on earth we do need to work to be happy. [2007:92]

Formulations of the afterlife are particularly insidious because, in addition to demonizing hard work, they lead believers to believe they are working hard. While some religious participants live an ascetic life and relinquish minor pleasures for promised rewards, contemporary Christian believers are rarely asked to work hard enough to obtain real satisfaction.¹⁰⁵ By freezing participants in a perpetual state of childhood, encouraging them to rely on others for individual happiness, and disparaging physical labor, religious formulations (particularly those focused on the afterlife) distract individuals from more substantive interests and concerns.¹⁰⁶ As Hitchens has phrased it, “To ‘choose’ dogma and faith over doubt and experiment is to throw out the ripening vintage and to reach greedily for the Kool-Aid” (2007:278).

The final possible detriment derived from individual participation in formulations of the afterlife is an increase in egocentrism. While one therapeutic benefit of religious conceptions is that they allow participants to imaginatively interject meaning into their everyday lives, the creation of spiritual narratives can

¹⁰⁵ Russell explains of this type of exhausting work, “No great achievement is possible without persistent work, so absorbing and so difficult that little energy is left over” (1930:53).

¹⁰⁶ This, of course, is not to say that religious formulations are always distracting, or even more distracting than other ideologies, just that they can divert individuals' attention from the tangible concerns of this world.

quickly become a narcissistic exercise when one imagines that every occurrence, no matter how small, was planned for them by an otherworldly parent. Dawkins proposes, “What presumptuous egocentricity to believe that earth-shaking events, on the scale at which a god (or a tectonic plate), might operate, must always have a human connection” (2006:238). This egocentricity has also seeped into constantly changing conceptions of the afterlife. As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, formulations of the afterlife often closely mirror the predilections of those who believe in them and have recently been marked, among contemporary Christians, by an increase in consumption, comfort, entertainment, and individuality.¹⁰⁷ I contend that the fact that religious participants imagine that this otherworldly paradise has been changed to suit their needs is another example of increased egocentrism.¹⁰⁸ With a contemporary increase in religious individuality, the rewards demanded by the faithful have been egocentrically embellished from immortality¹⁰⁹ to occupancy within an “eternal retirement village” (Segal 2007).

In this chapter’s theoretical investigation of formulations of the afterlife, I have shown that these otherworldly imaginaries carry powerful collective and individual appeal. In addition, I have also focused on the oft-neglected detriments that these conceptions potentially impart. This analysis has been included in the spirit of Marx,

¹⁰⁷ Clark explains of this increasing individuality, “Over the past few decades, we have come to see religious identity as something we choose for ourselves – even when we choose to take on an identity that is consistent with the traditions with which we grew up. It is the choice of the individual that is emphasized, not the institution and its preferred construction of what it means to be religious” (2003:8).

¹⁰⁸ The method by which these formulations of the afterlife are changed is another indicator of egocentrism. Lacan explains that subjects quickly realize their own desires are never wholly sated and that this satisfaction “can be unconditional only with respect to the Other” (1977:299). As an omnipotent and omniscient parent, I believe that the Christian god can serve as one example of Lacan’s “Other.” Individual desires are thus instated in the Other, who the subject then attempts to omnipotently control, in a way reminiscent of the projective identification which occurs for infants during the developmental stage of splitting.

¹⁰⁹ Hitchens explains, “First, one’s own death is cancelled – or perhaps repaid or compensated – by the obliteration of all others. Second, it can always be egotistically hoped that one will be personally spared, gathered contentedly to the bosom of the mass exterminator, and from a safe place observe the sufferings of those less fortunate” (2007:57).

who wrote, “The criticism of religion disillusion man so that he will think, act and fashion his reality as a man who has lost his illusions and regained his reason” (Marx 1978:54).¹¹⁰ I also hope that I have revealed not just that conceptions of the afterlife can increase social solidarity, group violence, motivation, and infantile behavior but how this takes place. Žižek proposes that dreams contain the “fantasy-framework which determines our activity, our mode of acting in reality itself” (1989:47). I argue that religious representations of the afterlife do the same, dialectically informing and revealing both collective concerns and individual desires.

¹¹⁰ La Barre echoes this sentiment in his call, “We buy adaptive potency each time the baby in us surrenders another fragment of its initial illusory omnipotence, and by abdicating godhood discovers the world, the objective dignity of other persons and things” (1978:63).

PART II

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE CHINESE AFTERLIFE

In this section, which features a focally framed history of conceptions of the Chinese afterlife, I will attempt to provide a critical analysis of the extant historiography while highlighting – and attempting to avoid – enduring ethnocentricities.¹¹¹ Although the majority of modern scholars produce meticulous, ethnocentrically aware research, some earlier (and more recent) cohorts failed to account for their own preconceptions and motivations.¹¹² As Paul Harrison (1995:51) proposes of his investigation into the convoluted origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the all-important question, “What are we looking for?” is indelibly influenced by the answer to, “Why are we looking?”

In selecting this topic, I am aware of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1992) call for self-reflexivity and Henrietta Moore’s reminder, “We do not spend enough time attending to the fantasies and imaginative images of the anthropologists themselves” (1994:6). I must admit, my motivation for pursuing a more detailed understanding of the Chinese afterlife is due in part to the fact that I was raised in a strictly religious household in which *Homo mortuus* played an integral part. In my subsequent rejection of these guilt-filled Christian traditions, I may have unconsciously chosen to study a version of the afterlife radically different from my own, often so outlandish I am comfortable it cannot exist. This allows me to feel secure in denouncing representations of the

¹¹¹ I have chosen to focus on otherworldly imaginaries themselves, not how religious participants are told they can achieve or avoid residency in these locations. For that topic see Payne and Tanaka (2004) and Nattier (2003). I have also chosen to focus on secondary materials because native scholars studying the history of Chinese hell, like Song (1984) or Zheng (1988), have largely avoided the three ethnocentricities discussed in this chapter.

¹¹² Funding for my research was generously provided by a Fellowship Grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (*Jiang Jingguo guoji xueshu jiaoliu jijinhui* 蔣經國國際學術交流基金會), a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award, and an Aisiang Cultural Foundation Su Tian-shui Memorial Fellowship (*Jinian Su Tianshui xiansheng nanying xue yanjiu jiang* 紀念蘇添水先生南瀛學研究獎).

afterlife with which I am more intimately familiar (although unconsciously, I am sure they still scare me to death).

While researching the history of Chinese conceptions of the afterlife, I came across three ethnocentrically motivated misconceptions which continue to persist. The first of these misconceptions is the notion that Chinese and Taiwanese citizens are somehow uniquely predisposed – through cultural emphases on filial piety and the cult of the ancestor – to produce and believe in otherworldly imaginaries. James McClenon proposes, “Since ancestral worship was a major component of their religious practice, Chinese people were particularly curious regarding the nature of the afterlife” (1991:326). This belief in an inimitable eschatological inclination has led some scholars, particularly those of the 1960s and 70s, to propose that Chinese conceptions of the afterlife may actually remedy our own modern malcontents (Bauer 1967; Blofeld 1974). Yet many Chinese, a citizenry often fallaciously referred to as a homogeneous entity, are not overly concerned with the afterlife and their otherworldly imaginaries can certainly not be imported to solve our everyday problems. What can be gained from studying the history of these religious conceptions is invaluable insight into the worlds of their creators and – peripherally – those who shared these beliefs.

The second misconception is that Chinese and Taiwanese citizens are at a religious or cultural disadvantage in creating conceptions of the afterlife and that they have therefore managed to devise an inconsistent or unworkable system.¹¹³ While some academics propose that the focus of Chinese religion is solely on the affairs of this world,¹¹⁴ others, such as Carl Becker (1993), rashly suggest that the participants of

¹¹³ Some scholars, such as J.J.L. Duyvendak (1952), have even proposed that Chinese notions of the afterlife, specifically hell, were completely purloined from Western or Indian representations.

¹¹⁴ Judith Berling states, “Chinese religion is notoriously this-worldly and pragmatic: Its main concerns were health, wealth, and descendants – in other words, good fortune in its various aspects” (1992:184). Even if one entirely disregards the otherworldly locus from whence this-worldly fortune is beseeched, proponents from every major Chinese religious system have influenced and participated in the creation of depictions of an afterlife.

these systems were unable to focus at all. Becker purports, “The Chinese mind did not separate this world from the next as consciously as do modern thinkers” (1993:48). Similar ethnocentric stereotypes led French Jesuit Henri Dore (1859-1931) to exasperatedly exclaim of Chinese representations of the afterlife, “The whole system is a bundle of inconsistencies and contradictions” (Vol. 7 1966:259). Though Chinese religious structures – like many cultural systems – are not always completely consistent, they are certainly not a “bundle of inconsistencies and contradictions.” As Arthur Wolf proposes, “The most important point to be made about Chinese religion is that it mirrors the social landscape of its adherents. There are as many meanings as there are vantage points” (1974:131). Chinese representations of the afterlife feature levels of complexity which amply account for the disparate concerns and desires of both creators and participants.¹¹⁵

The final major misconception concerning Chinese formulations of the afterlife is that they are only meditative tools which are not considered to be ontologically real by collectives or individuals. This ethnocentric error seems to stem from the fact that some scholars (Matsunaga and Matsunaga 1971; Berling 1992; Bauer 1967) have exclusively emphasized the allegorical nature of these otherworldly representations.¹¹⁶ Judith Berling expresses this position with her comment, “The Pure Land is merely a skillful means (*fang-pien*, or *upaya*) created by the Buddha to help us aspire to spiritual realization; it does not literally exist” (1992:190). While some religious innovators – and, presumably, most scholars – do not believe that Buddhist representations of paradise or hell literally exist, an emphasis on priest over layperson

¹¹⁵ For more on the conceptual panoply found within Chinese religion see Weller (1987).

¹¹⁶ Other scholars, such as Dore, completely misunderstood conceptions of the soul and depictions of the afterlife in Buddhism proclaiming, “What, therefore, suffers in hell, and passes from one existence to another, is impossible to understand, for in reality nothing exists” (Vol. 7 1966:259).

has unintentionally obfuscated the importance that these formulations hold as reality for many participants.¹¹⁷

I hope to avoid contributing to these misconceptions (or creating more by ignoring by own motivations) while providing a critical history of Chinese formulations of the afterlife. I will begin this section with an investigation of historical conceptions of hell before turning my attention to historical conceptions of paradise and, finally, narratives of heaven and hell in popular literature.

¹¹⁷ This emphasis on otherworldly representations as allegory has also confused many modern scholars, such as Richard Dawkins, who believes that Chinese religious traditions are more “ethical system” than true religious structures. Dawkins proposes, “I shall not be concerned at all with other religions such as Buddhism or Confucianism. Indeed, there is something to be said for treating these not as religions at all but as ethical systems or philosophies of life” (2006:37-38).

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF HELL

The raw scenes of violence featured in textual and visual depictions of hell have lingered in the Chinese aesthetic craw to become forceful religious didactics, entertaining cultural curios, and treasured art objects. As Neal Donnelly states, “Whether one believes or not, hell is presented in attention-arresting fashion” (1990:9). The destinations presented to those fated for the Chinese underworld range from an avoidance of expiation and immediate transportation to paradise (or a fortuitous rebirth) to eternal residency in the lowest Avīci hell (*Abi diyu* 阿鼻地獄).¹¹⁸ These myriad options have made it difficult for many Western scholars to determine the appropriate nomenclature for Chinese conceptions of hell. Hell, in Chinese, is literally “earth prison” (*diyu* 地獄) or “netherworld” (*mingjian* 冥間). Both of these descriptions indicate hell’s location beneath the earth, but fail to translate exactly as hell, purgatory, or underworld. While some scholars, such as Wolfram Eberhard (1967:17) and Donnelly (1990:9), seem recalcitrant to use the term “purgatory” because some denizens of hell are eternal residents and thus never completely purged of all sin, Anne Goodrich (1981:67), Stephen Teiser (1994:624), and Dore (Vol. 7 1966:258) argue that purgatory is the English word which most nearly agrees with the function of the Chinese underworld.¹¹⁹

Regardless of its title, historical representations of Chinese hell are simultaneously horrifying, entertaining, and deeply revelatory of collective concerns

¹¹⁸ As Cohen explains, “Incorporated into the image of hell was the possibility that at least a select few might be accorded entrance to the land of bliss shortly after death when, upon entering hell’s first court, they are judged to merit immediate release and salvation; and it is also possible that yet other souls may be granted admittance to heaven after a period of time in the underworld” (1988:186).

¹¹⁹ I have alternately referred to Chinese conceptions of the underworld as hell, netherworld, purgatory, and infernal realm in the belief that each of these terms conveys an adequate sense of this location’s form and function.

and individual desires.¹²⁰ These complex imaginaries – which draw on elements from Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Chinese popular religion¹²¹ – serve as a record of sociocultural, economic, political, and religious change, while periodically allowing glimpses of their authors’ personal desires. These desires are often exhibited in the wish to see one’s social antagonists gruesomely tortured in hell or in the longing to avoid this infernal realm altogether (it is rare that a tale’s protagonist actually receives purgatorial punishments). From grossly embellished tortures to bloody ponds and ox-head, horse-faced demons, Chinese conceptions of hell are certainly depicted in attention-arresting fashion and it is to the early history of these representations that I will now turn my attention.

Early History of the Chinese Underworld

Depictions of a Chinese underworld can be traced back to commemorative inscriptions found on bronze vessels in Shang and Zhou tombs (c. 1600-256 BCE) which reference an “underground” realm inhabited by the deceased. Though the historical details of this underworld are absent, there is textual and archeological evidence of the practice of human sacrifice at these tombs to provide the deceased with servants in the afterlife (Mu 2005:169). Yet some scholars, such as Hu Shih and Joseph Needham, obdurately propose that the Chinese lacked any formulations of the underworld before the arrival of Buddhism (see Yü 1987).¹²² Although the ingress of Buddhism into China did prompt major changes in representations and conceptions of

¹²⁰ Eberhard proposes, “The Tibetans and Mongols seem to have believed more in the idea of cold hells, while the Chinese seem to have developed mostly the ideas of hot hells, because, perhaps, exposure to cold was well known to Tibetans and Mongols and as much dreaded by them as exposure to extreme heat was by the Chinese” (1967:25).

¹²¹ Duyvendak explains, “Buddhist ideas of Hell were amalgamated with old Chinese notions, thus creating a system in which Buddhistic, Taoistic, and even Confucianistic elements freely intermingled” (1952:258).

¹²² Though, as Yü (1987) explains, Hu Shih later recanted his position, this lingering misconception still persists. Donnelly has recently proposed, “The concept of Hell came rather late to China. It arrived in the first century A.D. with the spread of Indian Buddhism which in turn borrowed the idea from Brahmanism” (1990:8). This type of statement ignores the fundamental contributions to the form and function of contemporary conceptions of the underworld provided by these early Chinese formulations.

the religious afterlife, an influential and creative period of underworldly development preempted its arrival.

More detailed references to this underground domain populated by the deceased are extant from the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 BCE), where it was alternately referred to as the “Yellow Springs” (*huangquan* 黃泉) or “Dark City” (*youdu* 幽都). The *Chronicle of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳),¹²³ a narrative history which details this Eastern Zhou period, mentions the underworld in a tale about the Duke of Zheng. Laurence Thompson (1989:29) explains that this Duke, angry with his disloyal mother, threatened not to see her until they met again at the Yellow Springs. After his mother’s death, the contrite Duke dug a tunnel in hope of reuniting with his mother at this sulfurous aquifer but the status of his success – or any additional information concerning this underground realm – has not surfaced within the known historical record. The term Dark City, which evokes images of an underground tomb or netherworld, first appeared in an anthology of poems from the Warring States period titled *Songs of the South* (*Chuci* 楚辭). Here, the poem “Summons of the Soul” (*Zhaohun* 招魂), based on the attempted ritual resuscitation of a deceased body by the capture of its soul, implores:

O soul, come back! Go not down to the Land of Darkness,
Where the Earth God lies, nine-coiled, with dreadful horns on his forehead,
And a great humped back and bloody thumbs, pursuing men, swift-footed:
Three eyes he has in his tiger’s head, and his body is like a bull’s.
O soul, come back! Lest you bring on yourself disaster. [Hawkes 1985:225]

As Mu (2005:170) states, this lyrical portrayal reveals an aversion within early representations of an underworld associated with death, darkness, and a ferocious demon, but fails to provide a methodical outline of this realm.

¹²³ For more on the *Chronicle of Zuo* see Ming (1989).

Major developments in the systemization of models of the underworld occurred during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). As Eberhard explains, “Chinese folk religion before the Han period (206 B.C.) seems not to have had the concept of sin, although it recognized a great number of supernatural beings” (1967:16).¹²⁴ Although complex demonographies, used by shamans to identify and control harmful spirits, have been dated as far back as the Warring States period,¹²⁵ it was not until the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–24 CE) that an official bureaucracy of the underworld was developed.¹²⁶ This hellish bureaucracy featured a Lord of the Underworld, an Assistant Magistrate of the Underworld, an Assistant of the Dead, a Retinue of the Graves, a Minister and Magistrate of Grave Mounds, a Commander of Ordinance for the Mounds, a Neighborhood Head of the Gate of the Souls, the Police of the Grave Mounds, a Marquis of the Eastern Mound, a Count of the Western Mound, and an Official of Underneath (Mu 2005:170). This bureaucratic structure,¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Though as Eberhard explains, the Controller of Fate (*Siming* 司命) “is mentioned in pre-Han texts, which give the impression that he is an official who deals out punishments and rewards as officials on earth do” (1967:17). This seems to leave open the possibility that the underworld may have been a place of punishment before the Han dynasty.

¹²⁵ An example of one of the earliest of these demonographies, recovered from a third century BCE tomb at Shui Hudi (睡虎地) in Hubei, is entitled *Jie* (詰) and consists of a prologue followed by seventy separate entries that detail a form of demonic aggravation and its ritual resolution (Harper 1985:460-461).

¹²⁶ Although no official bureaucracy of the underworld existed until this time, the third century BCE text, *Chunqiu Affairs and Speeches* (*Chunqiu Shiyu* 春秋事語), is focused on the untimely deaths of political protagonists who were portrayed as having posthumous careers as bureaucrats in the underworld (Pines 2003:115-117).

¹²⁷ Dating the bureaucratization of the netherworld in early Daoism is a difficult task. Lai (2002) has revised Seidel’s (1987) original proposition that the *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* (Nuqing guilu 女青鬼律) is a text which implies a netherworld bureaucracy. By mistakenly equating the second century CE *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* with the fifth century CE *Statutes and Ordinances of the Nüqing Edicts* (Nuqing zhaoshu guiling 女青詔書律令), a text which does provide the bureaucratic hierarchies of the netherworld and a soteriological conception of underworld demons meant to keep them from harassing the living, Seidel has pushed the date of the bureaucratization of the netherworld back three centuries. Lai (2002:258) explains that though some of the language in these two texts is similar, the earlier *Demon Statutes of Nüqing* is used to ward off demons by calling out their names but does not feature a netherworld bureaucracy.

which mirrored the official Han dynasty polity, was controlled by the Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi* 黃帝) from his residence in heaven.

The creation of a bureaucratically inspired underworld during the Han period was also accompanied by a spatial transformation. By the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE), the sacred Mount Tai (*Taishan* 泰山) became another location of the underworld in popular conception. As Mu (2005:171) says, the most probable process that led to this mountain's consideration as an alternative destination for the deceased began in books like the *Classic of History* (*Shujing* 書經). Written in the sixth century BCE, this book refers to a sacrifice made at Mount Tai by the filial King Shun (*Dashun* 大舜). The sacred nature of this mountain was further solidified because it served as the setting for imperial sacrifices, performed at the mountain since the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), and through the notion that it was the site where the Yellow Emperor performed a sacrifice to heaven which secured his immortality. A funerary text from the Han dynasty reveals, "The living belong to the jurisdiction of Chang'an to the west;¹²⁸ the dead belong to the jurisdiction of Mount Tai to the east" (Mu 2005:171). This mountain, thought to be ruled by the Lord of Mount Tai, did not usurp the position of the Yellow Springs or Dark City as the perceived location of the underworld, but merely served as an alternative venue.¹²⁹

While changing conceptions of the underworld in the Han dynasty included a bureaucratically controlled netherworld which was popularly imagined to be beneath Mount Tai, this underworld did not feature the purgatorial punishments so archetypal of later Chinese representations of the afterlife. The *Classic of Great Peace* (*Tianguanli Baoyuan Taipingjing* 天官歷包元太平經), written at the end of the

¹²⁸ The city of Chang'an (長安) was the capital during the Western Han dynasty.

¹²⁹ These alternate locations of the underworld are not exclusive or incongruous, as Thompson explains, "The symbolism is, in either case, the same: Earth is both source and destination; Earth is Mother and Devourer" (1989:35).

Eastern Han dynasty, divulged that names are catalogued in the afterlife according to the completion of good or evil deeds. Yet as Thompson states, “There is still lacking any indication that the latter receive punishment in the netherworld” (1989:37).

Although karmic retribution based on evil deeds is absent, the deceased were still believed to owe taxes and perform conscripted labor in the underworld. A text found within an Eastern Han tomb claims that its resident was buried with soybeans and melon seeds in order to pay this tax. The deceased was also buried with a lead figurine that could presumably serve as a substitute and perform the odious *corvée* conscription associated with the underworld (Mu 2005:170). While Buddhist notions of purgatory would soon reshape Chinese conceptions of the underworld, the Yellow Springs, Dark City, and Mount Tai represent the complex mixture of popular beliefs, contemplation of death and psychological inquiry, and socio-political structure that remains a defining characteristic of representations of Chinese hell today.

Introduction of Buddhism

The introduction of Buddhism into China – a complex and contentious process (see Chen 1964; Welch 1967; Zürcher 1959) – initiated fundamental changes in formulations of the underworld. These transformations included the introduction of horrific punishments based on a system of karmic retribution, the compartmentalization of this underground realm according to specific penalties, and the staffing of hell with foreign figures. Yü claims, “The idea of heaven and hell as opposing sites of reward and punishment in the afterlife was not fully developed in Chinese thought until the coming of Buddhism” (1987:386). The Buddhist method of transmission for these representations of hell in didactic tales and visual images was also pervasively adopted (and adapted) by its divergent Chinese audience. I will begin this analysis of Buddhist influences on the underworld with a brief investigation of the

Indian traditions which informed early Mainstream Buddhist conceptions of purgatory, before exploring the Buddhist models that shaped Chinese belief.¹³⁰

Since at least the development of the Suttapitaka and Vinayapitaka schools, the teachings of Mainstream Buddhism have included basic descriptions of purgatory. As Teiser notes, “Beginning with the *Nikāyas*, Buddhist sources describe the terrors that await sentient beings whose evil deeds in previous lives result in rebirth in hell” (1988b:435). These Mainstream Buddhist notions of the underworld were largely informed by Indian sources such as the *Mahābhārata* and *Institutes of Vishnu*. The *Mahābhārata*, written through a process of textual accretion which began before the sixth century BCE, includes detailed descriptions of hell and the painful process of metempsychosis which awaits those who commit evil acts. The section entitled “Anusasana-parva,” or “The Book of the Instructions,” includes a description of these purgatorial punishments.

The man who becomes guilty of ingratitude O king, has to go to the regions of Yāma and there to undergo very painful and severe treatment at the hands of the messengers, provoked to fury, of the grim king of the dead. Clubs with heavy hammers and mallets, sharp-pointed lances, heated jars, all fraught with severe pain, frightful forests of sword-blades, heated sands, thorny Sālmalis¹³¹ – these and many other instruments of the most painful torture such a man has to endure in the regions of Yāma, O Bharata! [Mahābhārata 13 CXI: 230]

Mainstream Buddhists also borrowed from Brahmanical texts such as the *Institutes of Vishnu* (c. 100 CE) where, if penance was not performed, one was sentenced to punishment in a systemized underworld which featured 21 hells.¹³² This

¹³⁰ Mainstream Buddhism is the more appropriate terminology for the sometimes derogatorily labeled Hinayana Buddhism.

¹³¹ This is the silk cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*) which is well-known throughout Asia for its large, thorny trunk.

¹³² These 21 hells are: Tāmisra (darkness), Andhatāmisra (complete darkness), Raurava (place of howling), Mahāraurava (place of much howling), Kālasūtra (thread of time or death), Mahānaraka (great hell), Saṅgīvana (restoring to life), Avīki (unceasing), Tāpana (burning), Sampratāpana (parching), Samghātaka, (pressing together), Kākola (ravens), Kudmala (bud), Pūtimrittika (stinking clay), Lohasankti (iron-spiked), Rikīsha (frying pan), Vishamapanthāna (rough or uneven roads),

text depicts the plight of those suffering in purgatory where, “Casting wistful glances upon the food and drink of others, they receive blows from ministers (of Yāma), whose faces are similar to those of crows, herons, cranes, and other horrid animals. Here they are boiled in oil, and they are pounded with pestles, or ground in iron or stone vessels” (Institutes 1880:143). The *Institutes of Vishnu* (1880:144-149) also outlines a system of karmically determined rebirths. For example, if one steals meat while they are alive, they are said to be reborn as a vulture. Some basic features of current Chinese conceptions of hell can be envisaged in these early descriptions: the Vedic figure Yāma still serves as one ruler of the underworld, torturers are half-man, half-beast, tortures include blows from heavy hammers and searing hot oil, and undesirable rebirths are promised as a consequence of evil actions.

Buddhists, who borrowed from these Indian traditions, developed their own schema for the realm of hell. The Buddhist term for hell is *niraya*, which as Samuel Beal (1871:56) explains is a Sanskrit word that means “opposed to reason” or “out of the right way.” This definition provides a linguistic clue to the netherworld’s location as hell was thought to be situated beneath Jambudvīpa,¹³³ the island continent inhabited by humans and located near Mount Meru on the Kāmadhātu plane of existence.¹³⁴ Dore says that, “According to Buddhist cosmogony, the existing universe consists of an infinite number of vast circular planes rising in tiers above Mount Meru, the ideal center of this fabulous world. The hells lie deep down in the system, and are situated 20,000 *Yoganas* (280,000 miles) below the earth” (Vol. 7 1966:253-254). Hell, imagined deep beneath the human realm, was often portrayed as a threatening

Kantakasālmali (thorny Sālmali trees), Dīpanadī (flame river), Asipattravana (sword-leaved forest), and Lohakāraka (iron fetters) (Institutes 1880:140-141).

¹³³ Jambudvīpa means “Rose Apple Island.”

¹³⁴ This is the Buddhist “Realm of Desire.”

city constructed of brass and iron which was surrounded by boiling rivers and trees made of knives (Beal 1871:57).

The disparities between different Vedic and Buddhist accounts of hell have led scholars to disagree on the “standard” number of hells in early Buddhism. Duyvendak (1952:259) explains that the most “orthodox” system includes eight, layered hells, which are each subdivided into sixteen lesser hells for a total of 136 hells. Dore (Vol. 7 1966:256) proposes that Mainstream Buddhism initially counted just eight hells, to which Mahāyāna Buddhism later added eight more. Beal (1871:60-65) claims that the Sarvāstivāda school of Buddhism featured eight hot,¹³⁵ eight cold,¹³⁶ and three frontier¹³⁷ hells. Teiser explains that while the earlier versions of hells described in the *Nikāyas*, *Jatakas*, and *Vinaya* of the Pāli Canon were often disorganized, “The system of eight hells was the ‘orthodox’ Buddhist cosmology contained in the scholastic treatises of the Sarvāstivāda school and in all of the Mahāyāna philosophical traditions that developed out of this tradition of dharma-analysis” (1988a:181). The amount of time served in this purgatorial realm was determined by the actual hell to which one was sent and the sentence was often doubled in each successive stratum. Buddhist formulations of hell were not yet solidified by the time they reached China during the Han dynasty and the textual record from this period reflects this continued development.

Some of the earliest translations of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese occurred in the second century CE with the arrival of Parthian monastic An Shigao (安世高).

¹³⁵ The eight hot hells of the Sarvāstivādins are: Sandjīva (Hell of Revival), Kālasūtra (Hell of Laceration), Sanghāta (Hell of Crushing), Raurāva (Hell of Shrieking), Mahāraurāvas (Hell of Great Shrieking), Tapana (Hell of Heat), Pratāpa (Hell of Fire), Avīci (Hell of No Intermission) (Beal 1871:60-62).

¹³⁶ The eight cold hells of the Sarvāstivādins are: Avata (Hell of Sores), Niravata (Hell of Scars), A-cha-cha (Hell of Chattering), Havava (Hell of Trembling), Hahaha (Hell of Shivering), Utpala (Hell of Numbness), Padma (Hell of Cold Sores), Pundara (Hell of Frostbite) (Beal 1871:63-64).

¹³⁷ These three frontier hells are solitary and located among the mountains, in the sea, and in the wilderness (Beal 1871:65).

This monk established a center for the translation of Buddhist texts at the Han dynasty capital of Luoyang, which was responsible for translating thirty-five books from the Mainstream and Mahāyāna schools. One of these translations, *The Sutra of the Buddha's Teachings on Sin, Retribution, and Hell* (Foshuo zuiye yingbao jiaohua diyujing 佛說罪業應報教化地獄經)¹³⁸ provides a detailed enumeration of transgressions and their hellish consequences. As Duyvendak explains, this sutra may be “the oldest description of infernal punishments in Chinese” (1952:281). This text features twenty different types of punishments: torture on Knife Mountain and in the Forest of Swords, being cut from head to toe by infernal attendants, having red hot nails driven into the body, being cooked in a kettle of boiling water, etc. This representation of hell also features the revitalization of the tortured by a cool breeze so that they may receive more torture. These punishments are comprised of an amalgam of the tortures of early Indian traditions, such as the Forest of Swords mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and *Institutes of Vishnu*; early Buddhist conceptions, like the Sarvāstivāda school's Hell of Laceration; and the exaggeration of other everyday pains, such as being pierced by nails or burned by scalding water.

Another early Buddhist scripture translated into Chinese by An Shigao is the *Sutra of Eighteen Hells*¹³⁹ (Shiba nilijing 十八泥犁經). This sutra outlines eighteen specific hells and their punishments, as well as the duration of time which must be served in each. A description of those destined for this infernal realm from this text reads:

In the beginning a person may be evil but then repent and become good. Such do not go to hell. The people who go to hell are those who kill, rob, take another man's wife, who want a person to die so that they can get possession of his property for themselves; people with dirty minds, thieves, people who do wrong; those who curse or are angry, who beat others or tie them up; those who expose the faults of others, who are jealous or who speak in anger. Such

¹³⁸ This sutra can be found in the *Taisho Tripitaka* (Dazang jing 大藏經) (Vol. 17:450-452).

¹³⁹ This sutra is located in the *Taisho Tripitaka* (Vol. 17:520-528).

people will go to hell, as will those who are domineering or act contrary to the will of the gods. [Goodrich 1981:129]

Much like *The Sutra of the Buddha's Teachings on Sin, Retribution, and Hell*, each agonizing punishment lasts for eons and if the occupants of hell die they are revived to be tortured again. The eight fiery hells¹⁴⁰ featured in this sutra are located below each other within the earth and the ten cold hells¹⁴¹ are said to be located where the earth and the sky meet (Goodrich 1981:128). Though it is unlikely that these early Chinese translations of Buddhist representations of hell were widely read, they prefigure the conceptions of hell that followed and share a similar structure, personnel, and karmically determined group of punishments.

Some measure of standardization for Buddhist conceptions of hell was achieved three centuries later with the translation of the *Sutra of Stability in Contemplation of the True Law* (Zhengfa nianchujing 正法念處經),¹⁴² said to be

¹⁴⁰ These eight fiery hells, whose Chinese names are often transliterations of their Sanskrit counterparts or descriptions of the hells themselves, are: (1) Xianjiu hu Hell (先就乎), the denizens of this hell constantly fight each other and the sentence to this hell lasts 135 billion years; (2) Julu cuige Hell (居盧倅格), occupants of this hell are burned and then fight each other and the sentence to this hell is 270 billion years; (3) Shangju du Hell (商居都), the residents of this hell are burned before being enticed to mountains which crush them and a sentence to this hell lasts 540 billion years; (4) Louni li Hell (樓泥犁), souls in this hell are enticed into a town where they are burned interminably and the sentence to this hell lasts 1,800 billion years; (5) Pangzu Hell (旁卒), occupants of this hell are boiled before being shoved in to a deep pit filled with fire, guards use iron sticks to beat these people within the pit, and a sentence to this hell lasts 2,160 billion years; (6) Caowu beici Hell (草烏卑次), this hell includes a town with walls two thousand *li* high and four thousand *li* wide which is full of fire and denizens are put in to this fire and crushed with iron for 4,320 billion years; (7) Duyi nanqie Hell (都意難且), people in this hell are burned in a fire and then eaten by worms while periodically a door is opened to which all of the occupants of this hell rush only to have it shut in their face and the sentence to this hell is 8,640 billion years; and (8) Bulu dubanhu Hell (不盧都般呼), this hell is filled with fire and its residents are forced to lie on beds of fire from which they cannot leave and the sentence that one serves in this hell is 17,280 billion years.

¹⁴¹ These ten cold hells are: (1) Wujing du Hell (烏竟都), occupants are burned before suffering in the freezing cold, people are then burned again, split in two, crushed by boulders, and ground in an iron mill. The sentence to this hell is determined by 128 *hu* of mustard seeds with each seed equaling one hundred years; (2) Nilu du Hell (泥盧都), the remaining hells, including this one, feature the same punishments as the first cold hell with the amount of mustard seeds doubled in each succeeding hell; (3) Wuluè Hell (烏略); (4) Wuman Hell (烏滿); (5) Wuji Hell (烏藉); (6) Wuhu Hell (烏呼); (7) Xujian qu Hell (須健渠); (8) Motou ganzhihu Hell (末頭乾直呼); (9) Qubu tu Hell (區逋塗); and (10) Chenmo Hell (沈莫).

¹⁴² This sutra is located in the *Taisho Tripitaka* (Vol. 17:37).

translated by Zhu Tan during the end of the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534 CE). Chen Hong (1994-5:129) claims that while translated descriptions of hell appeared as early as the second century CE, it was only within the sixth century's *Sutra of Stability in Contemplation of the True Law* that hell was described in great detail. This sutra's description of eight hot hells¹⁴³ reflects the standard Mahāyāna Buddhist representations of the infernal realm. These eight hells are divided into categories of sins committed in action, speech, and mind. The first four hells deal with sins of action: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and the use of intoxicants; the fifth hell administers punishment for sins of speech: lying and calumny; and the last three hells focus on sins of the mind: false views, defilement of religion, and premeditated crimes (Pas 1989:48-49). This *Sutra of Stability in Contemplation of the True Law* is also significant for the fact that it served as a meditative manual which invited its readers to “contemplate, and perhaps also to visualize the various states of existence to which his karma may possibly lead him” (Pas 1989:46). This encouraged contemplation led to further creative developments in conceptions of purgatory and anticipated the contemporary practice of imagining oneself as a protagonist in these otherworldly imaginaries.

While the popularity of these Buddhist conceptions of hell at the periods of their translation is difficult to gauge, these formulations were prevalent enough that, “When Han Ch’in, a minister of the Sui, died (592), the rumor spread that he had become King Yāma in the hells” (Maspero 1981:176).¹⁴⁴ The basic structure of these Buddhist conceptions of hell has, by and large, remained intact in Chinese

¹⁴³ The standard system of eight hells featured in this sutra includes: (1) Hell of Repetition (*huo diyu* 活地獄), (2) Black-rope Hell (*heisheng diyu* 黑繩地獄), (3) Crowded Hell (*hedu diyu* 合大地獄), (4) Hell of Screaming (*huanzhi diyu* 喚之地獄), (5) Hell of Great Screaming (*dajiaohuan da diyu* 大叫喚大地獄), (6) Hell of Burning Heat (*jiaore zhi da diyu* 焦熱之大地獄), (7) Hell of Great Burning Heat (*dajiaore da diyu* 大焦熱大地獄), and (8) Hell of No-Interruption (*abida diyu* 阿鼻大地獄).

¹⁴⁴ Goodrich (1981:74) writes that in popular conception the office of Yāma was later thought to be held by a Song Dynasty judge named Bao Zheng, recognized for his sense of justice and refusal of bribes.

representations to this day. Eberhard notes, “Some popular texts occasionally mix up names or sequences, but the general line remained the same from 500 to 1960 A.D.” (1967:25). The system of karmically determined punishments featured in Buddhist representations of hell has also remained a mainstay of contemporary depictions. Although the crimes punished and the method of their expiation have been adapted to suit readers of each particular era – for instance, the slanderers of Mahāyāna Buddhism,¹⁴⁵ of great concern to the authors engaged in establishing an emerging religious tradition, are no longer punished in the lowest realm of hell – contemporary depictions still feature numerous continuities from these early Buddhist sutras. Yet these influential iterations of the underworld were certainly not ubiquitously or unequivocally accepted by their Chinese audiences.

Transition from Buddhism to a Complex Mixture

While the arrival of Buddhism was certainly an essential element in the creation of representations of hell in China, many Chinese did not passively accept these foreign delineations. As Buddhist notions of the netherworld spread throughout China, they reciprocally influenced, and were influenced by Confucian, Daoist, and popular religious beliefs. One clear example of the transition from Buddhist conceptions of the underworld to a complex Chinese amalgamation can be charted in the transformation of belief in the ten kings of purgatory.¹⁴⁶ The earliest datable manuscript of *The Scripture on the Ten Kings* is extant from 908 CE, yet was probably produced sometime between 720-908 CE (Teiser 1994:628). An indigenous Chinese scripture which portends to be from South Asia, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings* is

¹⁴⁵ See the Mahāyāna Buddhist Śūrangama Sutra (Lengyan jing 楞嚴經) (2001:178).

¹⁴⁶ Unlike Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (1994), Kenneth Dean 1998, or Mayfair Yang (2000), who rely on outmoded notions of syncretism or hybridity – each of which possesses deficiencies in their usage – I prefer using the term “complexity” in an attempt to understand the problem of the historiography of Chinese conceptions of afterlife. An excellent example of how the term complexity can be used to explain religious mixture can be found in A. Thomas Kirsch’s *Complexity in the Thai Religious System* (1977).

both text and ritual process. As Teiser explains, “The long recension involves singing, rhythmic chanting, and worshipping, presumably conducted in unison; the viewing of pictures; as well as the elements more dependant on knowledge of literary Chinese like title, author, and narrative” (1994:627-628). These textual, ritual, and illustrative depictions of the underworld serve as an essential element to understanding the union between Buddhist and Chinese conceptions of purgatory.

The nearly thirty surviving copies of *The Scripture on the Ten Kings* from the Dunhuang caves¹⁴⁷ provide detailed descriptions of the ten kings of purgatory. As Pas explains, while Buddhist descriptions of the netherworld often divided it into eighteen hells – both hot and cold – or eight hells, “The Chinese chose the latter type and, in good bureaucratic fashion, added two more: one at the beginning and one at the end” (1989:48). These ten hells are ruled by mythological figures taken from both India and China.¹⁴⁸ Teiser explains that in the combination of Indian deities, like Yāma, and Chinese figures, such as the King of Mount Tai, “The dual provenance of the ten kings is one of the clearest indications that the idea of purgatory is a Sino-Indian synthesis” (1994:625). This complex mixture, personified by these royal figures, quickly spread across China¹⁴⁹ and even the prominent Song dynasty Confucian Ouyang Xiu (歐陽修)¹⁵⁰ purportedly dreamt of the ten kings. Teiser reveals, “In his waking hours Ou-yang may well have tried to furnish Confucian alternatives to Buddhist rituals, but folklore suggests that the ten kings still exercised a hold upon him when darkness fell” (1994:643).

¹⁴⁷ These copies include illustrations and one diminutive, personal copy that could fit within a pocket and was probably used as a talisman or personal study-guide (Teiser 1994:629).

¹⁴⁸ For a list of English translations see Teiser (1998b:433-434).

¹⁴⁹ Teiser proposes, “Judging only from unambiguous evidence interpreted conservatively, in the ninth and tenth centuries traces of the ten kings could be found across most of northwestern, northern, central, and eastern China” (1994:647).

¹⁵⁰ Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072 CE), a stalwart anti-Buddhist, served in many different imperial positions. For more on Ouyang see Egan (1984).

Illustrations of the ten kings, which served to propagate their popularity, detail the transition from Buddhist to popular Chinese formulations of the underworld. Early illustrations of the underworld, called “hell scrolls,” did not include the ten kings. Lothar Ledderose explains, “From literary records it is known that pictorial representations of the ten kings existed by the ninth century, and that in the tenth century they had become quite popular” (2000:177). In the early Dunhuang hell scrolls which featured the ten kings, they are portrayed in a vertical hierarchy beneath – and thus subservient to – the Buddhist ruler of the underworld, Ksitigarbha bodhisattva (*Dayuan dizang pusa* 大願地藏菩薩). These Dunhuang hell scrolls also featured illustrations of one of the Buddha’s sermons, six bodhisattvas, a black messenger, the prison of hell, and two spirit boys of good and evil (Ledderose 2000:177-179). Later hell scrolls from Dunhuang feature the ten kings and representations of the underworld in a different light.

The reign of Ksitigarbha bodhisattva, previously portrayed as the ruler of the underworld, is usurped in these newer illustrations by the increasing power of the ten kings who assume “ever more importance and autonomy” (Ledderose 2000:179). Teiser (1994:638) explains that while some of the Dunhuang paintings depict the ten kings as entirely subservient to Ksitigarbha, in others, each king is shown governing his own staff and court. The decline of Ksitigarbha’s authority began in the Tang dynasty (618-907), when Daoists presented the Jade Emperor (*Yuhuang* 玉皇) as an alternative ruler of hell (Goodrich 1981:21). By the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), the ardent Daoist Emperor Huizong (徽宗), whose rule lasted from 1101-1126 CE and was famous for its prohibition of Buddhism, commanded that the Jade Emperor be depicted as the ruler of both the Daoist pantheon and hell itself (Dore Vol. 7

1966:256).¹⁵¹ Ksitigarbha's weakening was accompanied by an increase in the ten kings' influence. Ledderose, who provides a comparison of the hell scrolls produced at Dunhuang with a set mass-produced at the eastern seaport of Ningbo during the thirteenth century, explains that in the Ningbo paintings, the kings are given much more elaborate settings. These newer illustrations feature the ten kings as autonomous rulers, a fact which is emphasized through the inclusion of armchairs, screens, and balustrades in each court, which Ledderose explains "are pictorial formulas that emphasize the authority of each judge" (2000:180). The illustrators of the Ningbo hell scrolls also omitted overtly Buddhist elements, such as the Buddha's sermon, the six bodhisattvas, and the black messenger, while transforming figures such as the boys of good and evil into office boys who carry the imperial seals (Ledderose 2000:183).

The changing role of King Yāma, the fifth king of hell and purgatorial figure most synonymous with Buddhism, also serves as a poignant example of the transition from Buddhist conceptions of hell to the complex Chinese creations which exist today. Yāma, the Vedic god of the dead who was borrowed by Buddhists from Brahmanism, was originally conceived of as a benign, heavenly deity (Law 1936:6; Matsunaga 1969:36) and original ancestor to mankind (Matsunaga 1969:34). Dore (Vol. 7 1966:250-251) outlines another mythic narrative regarding Yāma, who was said to have once lived as a human monarch in the Northern Indian kingdom of Vaisali. On one occasion, when battling a bordering nation, Yāma and his forces were nearing defeat. Yāma vowed to the powers of the netherworld that if he was granted a victory he and his officers would be reborn to serve in hell. Warriors from heaven quickly descended to assist Yāma in defeating his enemies and after his death, Yāma and his

¹⁵¹ The ten kings were also replaced by a Daoist set of gods during this period in Daoist liturgies such as the twelfth century *Ceremonial for Deliverance of the Ten Kings of the Dark Prefects* (Difu shiwang baduyi 地府十王拔度儀) (Teiser 1994:635). This imperially mandated change was not widely accepted and the ten kings reemerged as the rulers of hell in later representations.

soldiers were sent to govern hell. Yāma, who serves as supreme judge of the dead in the Buddhist tradition, does not condemn the deceased but simply ushers them before a karmic mirror which reflects all of their good and evil deeds. Matsunaga explains, “It is said, therefore, that Yāma is really an emanation of the Buddha Amitābha...who, moved by infinite compassion, descends into the deepest hells and through the power of the mirror of knowledge...is able to transform the sufferings into a cleansing fire so that beings can be purified and rise to better forms of existence” (1969:35).¹⁵² This sentiment can also be found in *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, which discloses, “Underneath their stern appearance and despite their complicity in torture, Yāma and his associates are revealed to be agents of compassion” (Teiser 1994:623). This perceived compassion would soon be the ruination of Yāma’s authority as these ideas were transferred throughout China.

As conceptions of the ten kings of the underworld were developed in China, Yāma was incorporated into this system with the name King Yāma (Yanluowang 閻羅王). Teiser proposes, “Although Chinese usage labels him a foreigner by rendering his name in transliteration, it also invests him with an air of local authority by adopting the Chinese word for ‘king’” (1994:625). Yet this “air of authority” was tempered by the fact that Yāma was now considered just one of the ten rulers of this underground realm. Ledderose explains that by this demotion, “The once powerful and demonic sovereign of the underworld continent has been transmuted into a government official, symptomatic of the transformation that Buddhism underwent in China” (2000:183). Yāma’s perceived loss of power did not stop there. Known for his compassion towards the deceased, Yāma was said to allow hell’s sinful souls the opportunity to return to earth and redress their karmic indiscretions. Yet this compassion also meant that “the other judges never had anybody come before their

¹⁵² For more similarities between Yāma and Amitābha see Matsunaga (1969:35-36).

tribunals, and the wicked were not punished. The Jade Emperor, to chastise him, demoted him from his leading rank and sent him to govern the fifth hell” (Maspero 1981:177). This demotion, handed down by a Daoist deity, is also thought to be accompanied by a thrice daily punishment in which Yāma and his lictors are seized to have molten copper forced down their throats (Dore Vol. 7 1966:251).¹⁵³

Bureaucratic Ambivalences

The compassionate complicity and subsequent demotion of Yāma serves as allegory for the cooptation of Buddhism in China and epitomizes the complex bureaucratic system which representations of hell were modeled after.¹⁵⁴ As Donald Gjertson proposes, “The nether world, at least superficially, was conceived as a construct physically and bureaucratically similar to the world of the living. Death itself is presented as parallel to arrest or official summons in the normal world, and several tales portray people met at the moment of death by men who take them into custody and lead them away” (1989:135).¹⁵⁵ When sinful souls were brought to trial in the underworld, they sometimes failed to recognize they had passed away because the afterlife’s *yamen* (衙門), local bureaucratic complexes, were said to be so similar to those on earth.¹⁵⁶ Not only were official buildings the same, the infernal court also functioned in similar ways to its counterparts in the mortal world.¹⁵⁷ As Gjertson (1989:136) explains, the infernal complex was often depicted with court recorders

¹⁵³ It is also imagined that Yāma and his officers will eventually be saved and attain the “bliss of Buddhahood” (Dore Vol. 7 1966:251).

¹⁵⁴ See Yang (1961:150-165) for more on how conceptions of the supernatural bureaucracy mirror the imperial bureaucracy.

¹⁵⁵ Kohn explains, “The main difference from the officials in the world is that immortals hold more power and have more ease, that they are unburdened by the sorrows of physical existence, and that they need not to worry about the well-being of either family or ancestors” (1993:334).

¹⁵⁶ Gjertson explains that within one tale the “official’s compound in the nether world is indistinguishable in appearance from one in the world of the living” (1989:135).

¹⁵⁷ Gjertson states that in many representations of hell, “The proceedings are carried out in a manner that was conceived to be identical to official proceedings in the world of the living” (1989:136).

writing and distributing documents,¹⁵⁸ clerks shuffling between courts, archivists locating and presenting official papers,¹⁵⁹ messengers ushering in witnesses,¹⁶⁰ and guards leading the condemned to serve their sentence.¹⁶¹ Pu Songling's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Liaozhai zhiyi 聊齋誌異) even describes a system of competitive examinations, similar to the imperial examinations on earth, which are held for posts in the underworld.¹⁶²

Though largely patterned after the mortal *yamen* system of trial and punishment, scholars have proposed that some essential differences between the organizations of the living and underworld remained. Eberhard explains, "Folk Buddhism eliminated the caprices or arbitrary reactions of deities, and instituted a religious system that we might call *constitutional monarchism*, that is, the belief in a law that is absolutely binding even for the judge and is administered in an impersonal manner by an appointed heavenly judge" (1967:18). In this new purgatorial system, corruption could be punished even if – as in the case of Yāma – one of the major figures of the system was guilty. Although Eberhard is correct that, in religious

¹⁵⁸ Gjertson reveals, "Two tales mention chief recorders (*chu-pu* 主簿) at Mt. T'ai, who seem to have had the responsibility of preparing documents for submission to the Heavenly Offices, and in both instances the documents appear to have had an important bearing on whether or not a person was to die" (1989:137).

¹⁵⁹ Ledderose explains, "The comprehensive files of the underworld were probably thought to be more like those in the capital, such as the Bureau of Executory Personnel (*liunei quan*), or in the Bureau of Administrative Personnel (*shenguan yuan*), agencies that maintained detailed registers on the performance of all officials in the empire" (2000:184).

¹⁶⁰ The testimony of these witnesses, who were summoned from the ranks of the dead, animal realm, and living (Gjertson 1989:136), was sometimes sufficient to prove a case was without merit, after which it would often be dismissed and the accused was allowed to return to life.

¹⁶¹ These guards are certainly not those found within the earthly Chinese bureaucratic system. These infernal emissaries and torturers were the ox-head (*niutou* 牛頭) and horse-faced (*mamian* 馬面) demons of the underworld. Maspero explains, "They are the souls of those who in life ate beef or maltreated their horses and who, in the other world, receive this form and function as punishment. And that is why they are portrayed in all temples of the Wall and Ditches with a man's body and the head and feet of an animal, sometimes costumed as mandarins' attendants, one carrying the axe and the other the trident, sometimes naked to the waist and bearing instruments of torture" (1981:183).

¹⁶² The story "Yu Qu-e" features a ghostly candidate who cheats by burning essays and swallowing their ashes and the tale "San sheng" includes a description of candidates who demand that Yāma pluck out the eyes of an incompetent infernal examiner" (Chen 1994-5:147).

conceptions, judgment in hell was supposed to be impartially administered, he pushes his analysis too far proposing, “In contrast to the conditions in this world, in the other-world’s hall of judgment there is no consideration of social class, status, sex, or age. Every person is treated mechanically according to the law” (1967:18). Eberhard further states that, “No bribery, no attempt to cheat, no attempt to use social status and influence will help” (1967:19).

While the possibility for impartiality existed in the netherworld – in a way that it never existed on earth – there are numerous examples of nepotism, corruption, and incompetence in hell.¹⁶³ The story “Xi Fang-ping,” located within *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, describes one man’s investigation into the unfair torture of his deceased father in purgatory. Xi Fang-ping travels to hell and finds that demon lictors have been bribed by an enemy of his father to make his father’s torture more unbearable. The judges in hell have also been bribed, and Xi himself is tortured on an iron bed and sawn in two. Though the demons sawing him are eventually impressed with Xi’s filial piety and release him, as Chen explains, “These descriptions of the injustice received in purgatory reflect injustice received in the world of the living. In religious texts...such punishments are always given to sinful souls, but in this story, Xi Fang-ping, the young man who has absolute devotion to filial piety and justice, is cruelly punished nonetheless” (1994-5:145). *In Search of the Supernatural* (Soushen ji 搜神記)¹⁶⁴ also contains one particularly poignant tale focused on the influence of familial ties in the story, “A Better Post in the Underworld.” In this tale, a general’s wife dreamt that she saw her dead son who complained that he had received a lowly post in the underworld. Though this general, Jiang Zhi, initially doubted his wife’s

¹⁶³ A popular saying illuminates this link between eschatological happiness and social status: “With money it’s the road to heaven, but without money it’s the gates of hell (*youqian jiushi tiantang lu, wuqian jiushi diyu men* 有錢就是天堂路, 無錢就是地獄門)” (Rohsenow 2002:186).

¹⁶⁴ See Gan (1996).

tale, his son eventually provided a detailed description of a nearby temple official who was scheduled, on the documents of the underworld, to pass away soon. This temple official agreed to help the general's son secure whichever post he desired and the general rewards him with many gifts. The temple official soon dies, and one month later Zhi's son appears in a dream and joyfully reveals, "I have been made Office Manager of the Court of T'ai-shan." (Gan 1996:185-186).¹⁶⁵

Although Teiser (1994:624-625) proposes that journeys to the afterlife are viewed as more "bureaucratic experience" than "psychological process," I believe that historical representations of hell reflect both collective, cultural concerns and individual desires. These individual desires are present as resistances to collective control, a desire to see injustices resolved, and a fear of political caprices and death. Although formulations of hell were often co-opted by the dominant ideology, Emperor Huizong's Daoist agenda is one example, they can also be employed as a form of individual resistance. Because Chinese representations of the afterlife were based on real historical systems, infernal imaginaries reflected both approbation and disapproval for the organizations on which they were based. Authors like Pu Songling used tales of the underworld, like the story of "Xi Fang-ping," to satire the Qing dynasty through the portrayal of bureaucratic corruption and the torture of innocent victims (Chen 1994-95).¹⁶⁶ Representations of the underworld also reflect a desire to see the injustices of this world addressed. Some examples of this can be found in the *Chunqiu Affairs and Speeches*, which depicts political figures who died prematurely continuing their careers as bureaucrats in the underworld (Pines 2003:115-117), and

¹⁶⁵ As Mu proposes, "If the imagination of man concerning the netherworld was determined by his value system, a netherworld that encouraged personal advancement could only have appeared after such a real world had already existed" (1998:176).

¹⁶⁶ Dore proposes of hell, "The crimes punished exhibit graphically those national failings and shortcomings, which the native administration, owing to its apathy and indifference, its supine habits and traditions, never attempts to suppress or punish here below" (Vol. 7 1966:261).

the Śūrangama Sutra (2001:178), which reserves the worst tortures in hell for those who oppose Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹⁶⁷

Finally, historical representations of hell allow their authors (and, by proxy, their readership) to allay fears of bureaucratic ambivalences and death. Although Yü is correct that hellish tortures were basically a “faithful reflection of the cruel realities of interrogation and torture in the imperial and provincial prisons” (1987:390), there are some notable exceptions.¹⁶⁸ One of these exceptions is that while the violent *yamen* system frequently employed torture to gain confessions from the innocent, journeys to hell in popular literature rarely feature the punishment of the story’s protagonist. More often, a case of mistaken identity or clever trickery allows the condemned to walk free.¹⁶⁹ The accused is often not merely released but also rewarded, as in the case of “Wen-ho meets the Shade of His Wife-to-be” and “Swift Traveler, Shih Hsü” (Gan 1996). These mistaken summons represent both the author’s desire to avoid underworldly – and worldly – punishments, and the desire that one’s own death may some day be delayed or avoided as a bureaucratic “error.”

Conclusion

In addition to investigating the historiography of Chinese conceptions of hell, one purpose of this chapter was to highlight and avoid some enduring ethnocentricities. The first two ethnocentrically motivated misconceptions state that

¹⁶⁷ Maspero explains that Chinese conceptions of karma also serve to explain why specific injustices occurred, “In Kiangsu, when an infant is born one-eyed, it is said that he was lecherous in his former life; if he has a harelip, it is because he insulted people without motive; if he is dumb or stammers, it is because he was given to contradicting” (1981:183).

¹⁶⁸ Another of these exceptions is that, as Ledderose explains, while some of the infernal torture depicted actually occurred, “The torture scenes in the Ningbo painting employ magical and fantastic elements as well, including a fire wheel that rotates by itself and pushes the sinners up into a knife mountain stacked with vertical blades” (2000:182-183).

¹⁶⁹ *In Search of the Supernatural* includes a story entitled “The Debater Offers a Substitute to Death.” This tale features a youth skilful in theoretical exposition who met a ghost charged with escorting him to the underworld. The youth pled convincingly for his life and the ghost asked him if anyone else in the area resembling him could take his place. The youth told him there was one guard who resembled him and the ghost proceeded to pound the man’s head in with a mallet. The guard was dead by mealtime and the youth was free to continue his life (Gan 1996:184).

Chinese citizens are either distinctively adept or uniquely ineffectual at formulating conceptions of an afterlife. While early Chinese representations of hell lacked a methodical outline (Mu 2005:170), indigenous conceptions of the underworld have existed since the Shang and Zhou dynasties and were depicted as complex bureaucracies from as early as the Western Han dynasty. These formulations were influenced by the ingress of Buddhism, absorbing the concept of sin (Eberhard 1967:16) and karmically determined punishments (Thompson 1989:37), and reciprocally affected Buddhist conceptions of hell, demonstrated in the shifting role of the ten kings of hell (Teiser 1994). The processes of continual creation and levels of complexity detailed throughout this paper, disprove notions that Chinese citizens are either adroit or unskilled in formulating conceptions of the afterlife.

While my paper thoroughly addresses the first two misconceptions, I would like to briefly speak to the final misconception, that Chinese citizens considered formulations of the afterlife to be mere meditative tools which were not considered to be ontologically real. The biography of monk Jing Ai (靜藹) serves as one illustration of the veracity of these otherworldly representations for some believers. Jing Ai (534-578 CE) is said to have frequented temples to view depictions of hell as a child where, “The sight of sentient beings undergoing infernal punishment for their previous acts had a transforming effect on the boy, who thereafter resolved to leave the householder’s life” (Teiser 1988b:437-438). After leading the life of a cloistered monastic, Jing eventually retreated to the mountains where, as Teiser explains, “Convinced that the legacy of Śākyamuni had reached its nadir during the suppression under Emperor Wu, he sat in meditation in the mountains and disemboweled himself, taking care to hang his entrails in the surrounding trees and to expose fully what remained of his impermanent physical self. At the final twist of the knife, his biographer claims, he was sitting calmly facing the paradise of Amitābha Buddha in

the west” (1988b:438). This extreme belief in the afterlife was not an isolated incident. Becker (1993:67) reveals that during one of Pure Land Patriarch Shan Dao’s (善道) rousing sermons on the Western Paradise, a listener immediately committed suicide in hopes of attaining residency there. While few believers demonstrated such extreme conviction, Robert Sharf explains that the majority of Chinese Buddhist practitioners considered the afterlife to be a reality as, “To deny the existence of either everyday reality *or* the Pure Land would be to err on the side of nihilism or naive idealism. Ultimately the Pure Land is no less real, and no more real, than this Sahā realm” (2002:319).¹⁷⁰

I hope that this chapter has exposed these three ethnocentric misconceptions, which are unfortunately still being perpetuated in academic literature, as groundless. I believe that by self-reflexively accounting for our own motivations and critically interrogating the history of cultural conceptions, contemporary scholars can avoid perpetuating ethnocentrically motivated misconceptions and account for the layers of complexity in historical formulations of the Chinese afterlife.

¹⁷⁰ Becker further explains, “Pure Land Buddhists accepted the provisional reality of all experiences, including dreams, visions, and meditative states” (1993:63).

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF PARADISE

Depictions of the underworld are certainly stunning in their descriptive detail and unabashed portrayal of retributive violence. Bauer proposes of Chinese hell, “Compared to it, the many heavens and paradises, including the most exuberant Buddhist ones, pale in every respect” (1967:196). This statement, on a very superficial level, may be correct. Depictions of a religiously informed paradise cannot overtly satiate voyeuristic interests as easily as representations of hell. While hell is supposed to be chaotic, violent, and unrefined, heaven is portrayed as serene, settling, and reserved. Yet upon closer examination, historical depictions of paradise are violent – evidenced in their exclusion of the masses, the uneducated, and women – and profligate – demonstrated by the many descriptions and images of feasts, palatial splendors, and dancing jade maidens. Another reason that Chinese representations of paradise pale when compared to those of purgatory is that, like the individual desires and collective concerns they signify, they are exceedingly diffuse and often purposely ambiguous. While purgatory, after the ingress of Buddhism into China, was generally located underground in a single, recognizable system, temporally analogous depictions of paradise could be found on remote islands, distant mountaintops, in hidden grottos, the heavens near the Big Dipper, and the remote Buddha fields located above the mortal realm.

Once geographically situated, paradise was often depicted as an unfriendly,¹⁷¹ unattainable,¹⁷² and unhelpful¹⁷³ locale. These ambiguities led to the portrayal of a

¹⁷¹ Heaven is the location from which punishment was decreed for those in purgatory. A man on the bank of the river in hell explains to the Buddhist monk Maudgalyāyana, “It goes without saying that Heaven punishes those who do evil, the minions of the underworld also promptly join in prosecution” (Mair 1994:1103). There are also tales of a heavenly dog (*tian gou* 天狗), which have existed since the sixth century ACE (Dore Vol. 5 1966:718), that feeds on the livers and blood of children.

heavenly realm which was sometimes underwhelming and often undesirable. Within the *Illustrated Biography of Ranked Immortals* (Zengxiang liexianzhuan 增象列仙傳), a Yuan dynasty collection of fifty-five illustrated biographies, is the tale of Master Whitestone.¹⁷⁴ This immortal was said to be able to walk over three hundred miles in one day, and although he was hundreds of years old, he appeared to be only 30. Kohn reveals in her translation, “When someone asked him why he did not wish to ascend to heaven, he replied: ‘I’m not at all sure I should enjoy myself as much in heaven as I do in this world right here!’” (1993:358). Master Whitestone’s comments were reasonable because depictions of the tedious bureaucracies of heaven, staffed by “fortunate” souls forced to perform administrative tasks similar to those on earth, lacked appeal. As Maspero explains, “Sometimes the souls of righteous people receive divine office because of their merits. This is not seen as an advantage, far from it, and most people prefer to hope that they will be reborn into a good family, wealth and endowed with ‘happiness’” (1981:183).¹⁷⁵ When depicted too spectacularly, critics doubted the existence of various paradises and attacked the method of their transmission.¹⁷⁶ Notable Daoists, such as Ge Hong (葛洪) (283-343 ACE), were

¹⁷² In the Buddhist tale of Maudgalyāyana’s journey through hell the protagonist exclaims, “Men mill everywhere about the evil way to rebirth as an animal, but the good way to the heavenly mansions is vacant morning and night” (Mair 1994:1105).

¹⁷³ *In Search of the Supernatural* provides a glimpse of these conceptions of heaven in the story “Revenge for the Ghost of Su Ngo” (Gan 1996:188-189). In this tale, Su Ngo was traveling with her maid and stopped at a station-keeper’s hut for medical assistance. This station-keeper, who soon realized that two defenseless women were traveling together, killed them both and stole their possessions. Su Ngo appeared as a ghost to a Regional Inspector Ho Ch’ang and relayed her story explaining, “Having been wrongfully murdered, I was sure my painful grievance would move the Heavenly Emperor. It turned out there was no place to lodge complaints there, so I came back to the world of light to address you, sir” (Gan 1996:189). The Regional Inspector asked how he could identify Su Ngo’s body when it is exhumed and she tells him. The station-keeper and his entire family were arrested and quickly executed.

¹⁷⁴ This immortal was given his name because he enjoyed boiling and eating white stones.

¹⁷⁵ *Journey to the West* (Xi youji 西遊記) divulges that even the nephew of the Jade Emperor, King Erlang, decided to stay on earth despite his immortality and familial ties. This text explains, “His heart was too lofty to acknowledge his relatives in Heaven; in his pride he went back to be a god at Guanjiang” (Wu 1993:128).

¹⁷⁶ In his anti-Buddhist treatise, written in 431 ACE, Hui-lin attacks the Buddhist notion of paradise. Bauer quotes him as saying, “When you praise the happiness of nirvana, you merely induce laziness.

extremely skeptical of those teachers who “brag wildly, saying that they have already ascended famous mountains and seen Transcendents,” or claim “personal knowledge of such things as Grotto Heavens and mountain paradises” (Bokenkamp 1986:71). As Cohen (1988:188) has suggested, salvationistic visions of paradise are also at odds with a traditional Chinese system of ancestor worship, which relies on continued reciprocity between the living and dead.¹⁷⁷ Yet despite – or, quite possibly, because of – these ambivalences, Chinese depictions of paradise flourished. As Bauer states, “The image of friendly, chubby-faced immortals flying about on clouds, of seductive maidens with jade-like skin, or of paradisiacal guards with boyish faces, shaped the naïve conception of happiness much more profoundly than all the socio-political theories ever could” (1967:201).¹⁷⁸

Early History of Chinese Paradises

The initial indicator of Chinese conceptions of the afterlife is archeological evidence of an analogous westward head position from the Banpo Neolithic (c. 5000-4000 BCE) cemetery near Xian (西安) (Mu 2005:169). Yet nothing else is known of notions of the afterlife from this early period. Textual evidence of belief in a heavenly realm is extant from Shang dynasty (c. 1750-1045 BCE) oracle bone inscriptions. As Mu reveals, “Primarily divination records, the inscriptions mentioned that deceased kings dwelled in heaven together with the God on High. This was clearly a very

When you describe the wonders of *dharmakaya*, you merely stimulate curiosity. The obvious desires [for worldly pleasures] have not even been put to rest, yet [new desires] for advantages in foreign lands already arise. Although you say that the Buddha has no desires, it is precisely in his name that the creatures are confirmed in theirs” (1967:157). For more on Hui-lin and this line of argumentation see Ch'en (1952).

¹⁷⁷ Cohen explains of these ancestors, “Because they are seen to have need and desires similar to those of the living, they certainly are not thought to be enjoying a blissful existence in the Western Heaven. Indeed, if they were held to be in paradise, the cult of the ancestors as popularly practiced would be seriously undermined” (1988:188).

¹⁷⁸ Schafer (1978) provides a scalding review of Bauer's book and its spurious reifications of China as an active and benevolent entity whose fantastic mythologies were somehow always corrupted by daily life. Despite Schafer's excellent points, Bauer's research – particularly on the grotto paradises of ancient China – raises some interesting questions.

special afterlife, available only for royalty” (2005:169). Bauer (1967:18) explains that the word “heaven” (*tian* 天) – with its body, head and arms – at first stood as a pictographic representation of the ancestor of the early Shang rulers before it eventually signified the location where the Zhou dynasty ancestors sat on their thrones. Granet similarly comments on the exclusivity of this heavenly realm where, “The royal Ancestors and their close followers alone participated in a sort of Elysian life” (1975:72).¹⁷⁹ As discussed in my first chapter, formulations of the afterlife – specifically heaven – focused on the founding members of society, can serve as social adhesive. Pas (1989:45) explains that the ancestor cult in early Shang China succeeded in uniting clans after the death of important members and was motivated by the belief that these ancestral spirits could help or harm the living. Though there is no textual evidence that the general population of this early period actively participated in the imaginaries of heaven itself, the continued development and transformation of largely homogeneous burial customs indicates some general beliefs in an afterlife.

The burial style of the majority of Chinese from the Neolithic to Warring States period was a vertical-pit, wooden-casket tomb. These tombs revealed social standing in the size of the pit, layer of caskets, and lavishness of funerary articles (Mu 2005:171). Beginning in the Warring States and Han periods, tombs were constructed of brick, a practice soon pervasive throughout Chinese society. These tombs quickly became increasingly elaborate, featuring antechambers with symbolic kitchens,

¹⁷⁹ Just as the emperor, or “Son of Heaven,” mediated between the mortal and immortal worlds, providing his subjects with the protection and weather necessary for a secure existence and expecting their loyalty in return, citizens in the Daoist tradition literarily owe their existence to heaven. The twelfth century text, *Scripture on the Loan for Life from the Celestial Treasury Following the Words of the Heavenly Venerable of Numinous Treasure*, describes the afterlife in monetary terms. “Everyone receives a loan from the Celestial Treasury in order to come to life. This loan has to be repaid by good deeds and in spirit money; otherwise, one will fall ever deeper into debt and thus unhappiness and hell” (Kohn 1993:343).

stables, and carriages and clay models of rice paddies, boats, cattle, and chicken (Mu 2005:171).

While these mortuary accoutrements may appear to reveal an increasing belief in heavenly realms, Seidel proposes, “In fact, the majority of Han funeral objects were not symbolic road signs for a further journey to a paradise but artifacts reproducing and symbolizing an afterlife in the tomb itself which was first of all a *residence*” (1982:106). These burial practices were based on the emerging Chinese belief in at least two distinct souls: the *hun* (魂) and *po* (魄).¹⁸⁰ The *hun* soul, described as a breathy, light substance in the first century BCE *Classic of Rites* (Liji 禮記), was originally thought to ascend quickly to heaven, while the *po* soul, associated with the body, descended slowly to the earth (see Yü 1987:374-375).¹⁸¹ Chinese burial customs, transformed to accommodate the assumed needs of the *po* soul residing in its luxurious tomb and surrounded by material comforts,¹⁸² were similarly adapted for the *hun* soul and its journey to the afterlife.¹⁸³

Chinese conceptions of paradise were fundamentally altered during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (140-87 BCE) due to the development of the cult of immortality (*xian* 仙). Citizens of the Warring States period were often presented with two equally unappealing destinations for the *hun* soul, the Dark City and the Yellow

¹⁸⁰ The number of souls varies according to geographical and temporal specificities. As Cohen explains, “Although it is commonly reported that there are three *hun* and seven *p’o*, other Chinese expositions of the subject describe different and various numbers of ‘souls’” (1988:182).

¹⁸¹ Yü explains that, “By the second century B.C. at the latest, the Chinese dualistic conception of the soul had reached its definitive formulation” (1987:374).

¹⁸² Mu (2005:172) has also suggested that by creating a sepulcher environment nearly identical to the mortal world, the living were relieved of some measure of uncertainty.

¹⁸³ Although this formulation of the dualistic soul remains a fundamental facet of Chinese religious belief, it never negated the importance of an afterlife. As Yü reveals, “Long before the rise of the dualistic conception of the soul, there had already been a common Chinese belief in the afterlife. The notion that the departed soul is as conscious as the living is already implied in Shang-Chou sacrifices” (1987:378).

Springs.¹⁸⁴ As Mu explains, this prompted the royal family to develop a more alluring realm which featured “a new dimension, that is, the existence of immortals and the possibility for men to achieve immortality” (1998:158-159). This supplementary destination was modeled, in part, on shamans’ poetic accounts of flights to these heavenly realms. Bronze vessels bearing the likeness of bird-headed humans and people with wings, thought to be the earliest representations of these immortals (Mu 1998:161), exist from before the establishment of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE). Yü proposes that immortality “was a unique idea in ancient Chinese thought and probably began as a romantic conception of total spiritual freedom” (1987:386). This freedom, which was never total for the ascetic shaman-poet who imagined the heavenly domain as an alternative to this corrupt world which still maintained rigid religious proscriptions, appealed to Chinese rulers who – as “sons of heaven” – quickly adopted notions of the immortal as *persona par excellence*. Yü explains, “Princes and emperors were not interested in transforming themselves into *hsien* immortals because they had suddenly developed a renunciatory attitude toward the honors and pleasures they enjoyed in this world. On the contrary, they were motivated by a strong desire to prolong their worldly pleasure forever” (1987:387). By the first century ACE, this cult of immortality had seeped from sovereign to citizen.¹⁸⁵

As this imperially influenced conception of immortality spread, the bureaucratic structure associated with the royal family was also introduced to

¹⁸⁴ As Mu proposes, “The reason why the First Emperor of Ch’in, Han Wu-ti, and even Wang Mang, incessantly sought immortals and elixirs for longevity was precisely because the official religion could not provide them with the hope of immortality” (1998:158).

¹⁸⁵ Yü reveals that one tombstone inscription from this period tells of a man who attained the rank of immortal and “ascended to heaven not only with his whole family but also his house and domestic animals” (1987:388). Mu explains that in the fourth century *Biographies of the Immortals* (Shenxian zhuan 神仙傳), “high social status was not a prominent characteristic of immortals. A number of immortals were actually said to have come from the underclass” (1998:163).

formulations of the heavenly realm. Though notions of a “heavenly court”¹⁸⁶ have existed as early as the Shang dynasty, this paradise initially “may have been reserved only for the long-lasting, if not immortal, souls of the kings and lords as a depository of social authority” (Yü 1987:382). Common citizens were admitted to this heavenly court in the early Daoist canon, *The Classic of Great Peace* (Tianguan libao yuan taipingjing 天官歷包元太平經), which is datable to the second century ACE. Here, four distinct bureaucratic departments are staffed by the souls of the deceased: the Department of Fate, Department of Longevity, Department of Good Deeds, and Department of Evil Deeds (Yü 1987:383). *The Classic of Great Peace* also reveals that each department keeps detailed records on every earthly inhabitant. These heavenly courts also function in modes analogous – though on a heavenly level – to the imperial systems. Kohn explains that this early celestial hierarchy was, “Ranked in nine levels, in close imitation of the imperial bureaucracy on earth” (1993:333). Similarities between these earthly and heavenly systems also include a bureaucracy that operates according to the rules of both meritocracy¹⁸⁷ and nepotism and personnel which are rewarded for estimable service.¹⁸⁸

Although formulations of the heavenly realm were bureaucratically inspired, some major discrepancies between the imperial and celestial systems also existed. One major difference, as Cohen (1988:184) has suggested, is that these bureaucratically inspired visions of the heavenly court always included more deities than the imperial

¹⁸⁶ Cohen proposes, “A court, with its complex interweaving of bureaucratic, personal, and indeed domestic relationships, served as a most appropriate locale for gods to whom appeal was made by individuals and communities on the basis of their personal efficacy” (1988:184).

¹⁸⁷ Kohn (1993:333-334) explains that the typical immortal neophyte starts as a low-level administrator within a specific department of the heavenly administration, such as the Department of Destiny, the Department of Pestilence, the Department of Rain and Wind, or the Department of Earth Prisons, before being granted more responsibility.

¹⁸⁸ Kohn reveals, “Immortals, once they have served with merit in various offices, may take some time of leave...they may also, for the pure fun of it, go back to the world of mortals, be born as emperors and kings, as court ladies or as wandering mendicants. Already immortal to begin with, they are strange figures among mortals and can fly off again any time” (1993:334).

system and entrée to these gods was far easier for both individual and community than contact with actual government officials. Another divergence in these representations is personified by the female deities who are often portrayed in prominent political roles, nearly always reserved for males in the mortal realm. I will now shift my focus from the cult of immortality and bureaucratic structures that inspired the creation and shape of these heavenly realms to the actual descriptions of these locations themselves.

Two distinct depictions of paradise initially existed as possible destinations for the *hun* soul, earthly and celestial. Bauer (1967) has proposed that within early narratives concerning paradise there are two dominant genres, both dating back to the second and first centuries BCE. These are the detailed “geographic” accounts of paradise, found in books such as *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji 史記), and the poetic or “dreamlike” descriptions of heaven, evinced in texts like *Songs of the South*. Though many accounts of Chinese paradises fail to fall neatly into one category or the other, these useful heuristics provide an expedient starting point from which to explore the heavenly realms. I will begin with an investigation of geographical accounts, which reveal diverse formulations of earthly paradises, before turning to their poetic counterparts, which are focused on the celestial realms above.

Geographical Conceptions of Earthly Paradises

Tomb paintings and funerary articles from the Han dynasty often depict a joyful hereafter with scenes of banquets, festivals, and hunting, while inscriptions on bronze mirrors promise a carefree afterlife filled with the pleasures of the immortals (Mu 2005:172). Yet none of this sepulcher *objet d'art* reveals much about the specific conceptions of these realms. A funeral banner, found in the Western Han dynasty Ma Wangdui (馬王堆) tomb,¹⁸⁹ displays a basic outline of this early, heavenly geography.

¹⁸⁹ This tomb is located in the Southcentral Chinese city of Changsha (長沙).

This banner depicts a deceased countess being borne aloft to a celestial realm above an earthly dominion and underworldly ambit, yet fails to provide any particulars regarding these locations. While researchers generally agree that the top of the funeral banner found in this tomb represents some form of paradise, Seidel (1982:84-85) explains that opinions range between scholars like Hiroshi Sofukawa, who argues that the countess is being transported not to heaven but to Mount Kunlun, and Michael Loewe, who maintains that she is traveling to the island paradise of Penglai. Descriptions of both of these early representations of paradise, one located on Mount Kunlun and the other on Penglai Island, are located in the geographical accounts of this-worldly paradises.

Mount Kunlun (Kunlun Shan 崑崙山)¹⁹⁰ – like many of the earthly paradises of this early era – was located on the frontier of known civilization. This sacred realm of the west was said to have been visited by King Mu of Zhou (Zhoumu Wang 周穆王), the fifth sovereign of that dynasty, and Emperor Wu of Han. Yet despite these monarchs' privileged audience with Mount Kunlun's immortal ruler, the Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wangmu 西王母),¹⁹¹ they failed to attain immortality (Seidel 1982:103-104). Bauer proposes of this Queen Mother's origin, "Originally, in transcription, the term Hsi-wang-mu seems to have designated nothing more exotic than a small state in the west of China. By chance, a sign meaning 'mother' was chosen for its final syllable...But later, the imagination seized on this sign, turning the place into a personal name" (1967:95). The Queen Mother rules her palace on Mount Kunlun with the Lord King of the East (Donghua Dijun 東華帝君). Their jade palace,

¹⁹⁰ One of the longest mountain chains in Asia, the Kunlun Mountains are crested by the Kunlun Goddess, a 7,167 meter peak near the town of Keriya (Yutian 于田) in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China.

¹⁹¹ Of the Queen Mother of the West Maspero explains, "She was originally the goddess of epidemics, living to the west of the world and commanding the demons of pestilence. Towards the end of the first century B.C. a sort of panic spread throughout the north of the empire: a terrible epidemic was announced, from which only those who placed on their doors certain charms of the Queen Mother of the West would be protected" (1981:195). For more on the Queen Mother see Seidel (1982:99-106).

which is nine stories tall, surrounded by a golden wall, and home to verdant gardens including a peach tree of immortality, is said to be staffed by an incalculable number of servants, just like the imperial court. Maspero (1981:196) explains that female immortals live in the left wing of the palace, surrounded by the Lake of Pearls, while male immortals live in the right wing, which is split by the River of Kingfishers. When these immortals arrive at the palace on Mount Kunlun they pay homage to the Queen Mother of the West, the Lord King of the East, and the Three Clarities.¹⁹² As Maspero reveals, “After that they live in joy and festivities, removed from pain and death, while carrying out the various functions of the palace. If they commit grave crimes, they are excluded for a while. They then descend to be born on earth until after their transgression atoned for, they return to resume their rank” (1981:196). Though the functionaries of this realm are immortal, it is only the regents of Mount Kunlun who enjoy full happiness.¹⁹³

Belief in the island paradise of Penglai, and surrounding heavenly isles thought to be located somewhere in the oceans to the east of China, was “perhaps the most famous or pervasive” (Berling 1992:187) of all the early conceptions of paradise. *Records of the Grand Historian*, written in approximately 100 BCE, contains a description of this fleeting island paradise. This text explains that during the time of Prince Wei, who governed from 378-343 BCE, mariners were dispatched from the eastern coast of China to locate the three heavenly islands of Penglai (蓬萊), Fangzhang (方丈), and Yingzhou (瀛州).¹⁹⁴ This record reveals:

¹⁹² These Three Clarities, all Daoist deities, are: The Universal Lord of the Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊) who resides in the Jade Clarity (Yuqing 玉清), The Universal Lord of the Numinous Treasure (Lingbao Tianzun 靈寶天尊) who rules the Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清), and The Universal Lord of the Way and its Virtue (Daode Tianzun 道德天尊) who lives in the Ultra Clarity (Taiqing 太清).

¹⁹³ Bauer (1967:95) proposes that this is the reason why Mount Kunlun never took hold on the imagination or persisted as an important location of paradise.

¹⁹⁴ These islands are listed in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (Shanhai Jing 山海經) (1999) with two additional immortal isles, Daiyu (岱輿) and Yuanjiao (員嶠).

They are not far distant from the habitations of men. The only problem is that at the very moment they have almost been reached, the ship is [usually] seized by a wind and carried off. Once there were [sailors] who approached very close. [They saw that] only “immortals” (*hsien-jen*) lived on the islands, and that they had found the elixir of eternal life. All creatures there, birds and animals, are of the clearest white, and the palaces and gates of the purest gold and silver. [The sailors] had not yet landed, but saw all this in the cloudy distance. [Bauer 1967:96-97]

As the boundaries of known civilization were pushed farther from the coast of China, these fantastic islands retreated in kind. The *Record of the Ten Continents* (Hainei shizhou sandao ji 海內十洲三島記), written in the fourth or fifth century ACE, provides some details of even further heavenly isles. This text mentions an “Island of Life” (Shengzhou 生洲), said to be 170,000 miles past Penglai. This 2,500-square-mile isle was imagined to be the home to ten thousand immortals, have a temperate climate, and lush vegetation. The *Record of the Ten Continents* reveals, “Because excessive heat or cold are unknown, the creatures living there have no need to worry about food. There are many mountains and rivers; besides, the “divine plant” grows there, as do all kinds of immortality herbs. The water on the entire continent tastes like sweet buttermilk. It is a very choice continent” (Bauer 1967:179). While renowned, these remote mountains and distant isles were not the only locations of earthly paradises.

Another form of earthly paradise, again located on the margins of society, is the grotto or cave paradise.¹⁹⁵ Bauer (1967:192) proposes that the Chinese word for cave (*dong* 洞) suggests a passage or transition, more than the closed or temporary hiding place which the English word brings to mind. Franciscus Verellen explains that these grotto paradises were frequently depicted as the source of mountain springs, signifying life or renewal, while serving as a “place of refuge from civilization: a place

¹⁹⁵ Verellen (1995:272) reveals that while the arduous journey to the summit of a mountain may have been considered a religious act, the descent to its grotto-heaven required an additional level of purification and esoteric knowledge.

of seclusion, liberation, and transcendence where the adept seeks medicinal herbs and minerals – including deposits of calcium carbonate left by the life-giving ‘milk’ that was thought to drip from the stalactites in limestone caves” (1995:268). The most famous of all grotto paradise accounts was written by Tao Qian (陶潛) (365-427 ACE),¹⁹⁶ an early, well-known Chinese poet, who wrote “Account of Peach Blossom Spring.”

This tale tells of a fisherman, Wu-ling, who stumbled upon a village hidden from the outside world for over 60 years. The translation, provided by Stephen Owen describes, “Greybeards and children with their hair hanging free all looked contented and perfectly happy” (1996:309). The fisherman is treated to several days of luxurious hospitality as he recounts the events of the three dynasties since the residents of this grotto paradise went into hiding. As he departs, the villagers caution Wu-ling that he should not reveal their existence to anyone. Yet the fisherman proceeds directly to the local official and reports his peculiar encounter in detail. Though the governor immediately dispatches underlings to determine the whereabouts of this hidden paradise, none are successful. These grotto paradises have remained the criterion of a life free from the strictures of government taxation and oppression under turbulent dynastic rule. As Bauer reveals, “More than any other word, the term ‘peach font’...has come to denote the very essence of paradise in China” (1967:191).

The “Account of Peach Blossom Spring” was predated by the “Grotto Passage,” a more descriptive account of these earthly paradises and Tao Qian’s direct inspiration (Bokenkamp 1986:65), which is located within the Daoist canon in the *Scripture of the Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure* (Lingbao wufu jingxu 靈寶五符經序). This story, which has been tentatively dated to sometime before

¹⁹⁶ Though this story remains the quintessential grotto tale, it was ironically written to criticize “the single-minded pursuit of Taoist wonders, probably on the part of some acquaintance of his among the Nan-yang Liu family 南陽劉” (Bokenkamp 1986:69).

Shangqing Daoist Yang Xi's revelations in 330 ACE,¹⁹⁷ records that King He Lü, who reigned from 514-496 BCE, frequently met with an ascetic styled the "Recluse of Mount Bao." It was during one of these visits that the King made the Recluse a temporary envoy so that he could locate the source of the Grotto Court which was found deep within the mountains. The Recluse of Mount Bao journeyed through the earth for 174 days before he returned with this tale of the grotto paradise:

Looking up, it was like the sky and the light of the sun became increasingly bright, until it was as bright as midday. Further, it was neither too warm nor too cool, but pleasantly mild. He smelled fragrant vapors which commingled and billowed forth incessantly. At the side of the passageway there were houses, pavilions and way-stations of carved and etched precious stones, so many that his eyes could not take them all in. Then he came to the mouth of the various passages where he traveled around both the broad and the narrow spaces. The Recluse circled the entire Grotto Court and, at a distance apart of about 40 or 50 *li*,¹⁹⁸ there were jade pillars on the four sides with placards which proclaimed: "Barrens of the Grotto Court of the Nine Springs." Between them grew groves of trees in rows – green leaves, purple blossoms, dark grasses, white flowers – none of which the Recluse could name. The five colors arose of themselves and the seven treasure-gems blazed forth in scintillating radiance. Flying phoenixes soared around the tips of the trees; dragons and kirin played below. This was truly the numinous storehouse of heaven and earth, the flourishing Hostelry of the Perfected Beings!
[Bokenkamp 1986:66-67]

By the Tang dynasty (618-907 ACE), Daoist court official Du Guangting (杜光庭) (850-933 ACE), an authority on the subject of grotto-heavens, was the first to set out two separate series of grotto cosmographies which included ten and thirty-six¹⁹⁹ separate heavenly realms.²⁰⁰ His description of these realms, the *Record of Grotto-heavens, Blessed Places, Ducts, Peaks, and Great Mountains* (Dongtian fudi yuedu

¹⁹⁷ Concerning the date of this text Bokenkamp writes, "The only point of consensus reached so far among Taoist specialists is that the Five Talismans is an ancient text with later interpolations and deletions" (1986:65).

¹⁹⁸ One *li* (里) is equal to 500 meters.

¹⁹⁹ Verellen (1995:276) explains that it is plausible, though not confirmed, that these thirty-six grotto-heavens may have mirrored the thirty-six heavens found in the Shangqing cosmology.

²⁰⁰ For a list of these ten and thirty-six grotto heavens and their approximate geographic locations see Verellen (1995:289-290).

mingshanji 洞天福地嶽瀆名山記), written in 901 ACE, postulates that when heaven and earth divided, “Above they laid out the stellar mansions, below they stored the grotto-heavens. The affairs of each of these being administered by great sages and superior Perfected, they contain divine palaces and spirit residences, jade halls and gold terraces: soaring structures of congealed clouds, formed from solidified ether” (1995:272).

Daoist earth-immortals (*dixian* 地仙) were imagined wandering throughout these subterranean realms, just as they were able to wander freely throughout the human body, another location of paradise in Daoist depictions. The twisting and dark passages in these tales, which open to an exposed grotto, serves as a metaphor for the individual’s dark interior, which can be similarly opened to understanding. As Verellen proposes, “The grotto-heavens clearly constituted a form of interiorized ‘counter-universe,’ to be contemplated by the methods of visualization” (1995:276). As the Shangqing school of Daoism developed with its emphasis on individual meditation techniques,²⁰¹ it eventually produced “such mental disciplines as ‘inner alchemy’ (*neidan* 內丹),²⁰² in which the body became a spiritual reaction-vessel, and ‘inner contemplation’ (*neiguan* 內觀), a regime of systematic introspection of the practitioner’s own body and mind” (Verellen 1995:276-277). This tradition of inner-alchemy, which posits a vision of the body as microcosm of the universe, can also be found in other well-known Chinese texts, such as the third century ACE *Record of the Three and Five* (Sanwu liji 三五歷紀), which contains the creation myth of Pangu, from whose body the world was created, and the Tang dynasty *Scripture on Inner*

²⁰¹ Though these Shangqing rituals were primarily focused on the ecstatic flight of the individual, Judith Boltz explains that the Lingbao (靈寶) tradition was concerned with the welfare of the community through universal salvation and “communal rites of passage” (1983:495).

²⁰² Regarding this process of “inner alchemy” Boltz explains, “The adept’s visualization of his body as a microcosm of the universe within which the path to salvation can be plotted mirrors the microcosm that the alchemist is able to recreate within a reaction vessel” (1983:494).

Observation (Neiguan jing 內觀經), which documents the cosmic properties of the body while teaching practitioners how to travel through these internal realms (Kohn 1993:168-169). Shangqing literature, like the pre-fifth century ACE *The Purple Writ of Azure Crux and the Aggregate Scriptures of the Golden Root, from Highest Clarity in the Cavern of Realization*, frequently feature characters like the Azure Lad, a heavenly being who is as equally at home in celestial palaces as “the microcosm of the human body” (Kroll 1985:79). These earthly paradises, found on remote mountains, distant isles, secluded grottos, and sheltered within the body, represent just one mode of heavenly abode. I will now shift my focus from these earthly representations of paradise to their celestial counterparts.

Poetic Accounts of Celestial Paradises

The terrestrial realm was not the only location in which one could escape from a corrupt world and exist in immortality.²⁰³ The earliest “poetic” – to borrow from Bauer’s (1967) bifurcation – descriptions of conceptions of a celestial realm of paradise occur in the Warring States anthology *Songs of the South*. In *Songs of the South*, a brief picture of heaven is provided within the chapter entitled “Nine Songs” (Jiuge 九歌), the oldest textual example of a shaman’s ecstatic flight in China.²⁰⁴ This poem begins, “Open wide the door of heaven! On a black cloud I ride in splendor, bidding the whirlwind drive before me, causing the rainstorm to lay the dust!”

²⁰³ As Bauer explains, “The sages who have attained immortality not infrequently ascend ‘in broad daylight’ from high mountains to the ether. But only in the rarest cases does it become wholly clear whether heaven is really their home, or whether they are not merely traveling through the air to shorten the long distance between the faraway but this-worldly paradises, and the continents inhabited by men” (1967:101). Descriptions of heavenly paradises from these early eras are infrequent compared to accounts of earthly paradises. Of this imbalance, Bauer proposes, “A number of reasons may be responsible. It is possible that the openness of heaven offered the imagination less of a chance to conceive of real countries there, although their existence had been a staple element of popular belief since the Han period. It was easier to be fascinated by the thought of walking through mountains of clouds than to take up residence in cloud castles” (1967:99).

²⁰⁴ Though these shamanistic flights are textually and not ritually produced, Paul Kroll proposes, “Historians of religion would have no trouble in seeing the euphoria produced in the poet by this interlude as equivalent to the rapt trance of the shaman” (1996a:658).

(Hawkes 1985:110). The gates of this heavenly realm can also be glimpsed in the poem *cum* ritual “Summons of the Soul” which pleads:

O soul, come back! Climb not to the heaven above,
For tigers and leopards guard the nine gates,
With jaws ever ready to rend up mortal men,
And one man with nine heads that can pull up nine thousand trees,
And the slant-eyed jackal-wolves pad to and fro;
They hang out men for sport and drop them in the abyss,
And only at God’s command may they ever rest or sleep.
O soul, come back! Lest you fall into this danger. [Hawkes 1985:225]

In these brief descriptions, which Thompson has labeled a “mélange of folklore, myth, and rumours about unknown lands beyond the frontiers of civilization” (1989:33),²⁰⁵ heaven remains an indistinct – and not always desirable – locale located somewhere in the celestial realms above.

Songs of the South features a more detailed look at the realm of heaven in two additional poems, “On Encountering Trouble” (Lisao 離騷) and “Far-off Journey” (Yuanyou 遠遊).²⁰⁶ These poems reveal a transition in formulations of heaven from an unpromising and indefinite setting to a destination which is desirable. Both poems present a versified flight from the corruption of this world and a fantastical journey through the celestial realm. Yet while in “On Encountering Trouble” the poet is turned away at heaven’s gate by a churlish porter, the anonymous author of “Far-off Journey” commands that heaven’s warder open its gates before traveling through the four quadrants of heaven in a large carriage hitched to magnificent horses bearing rainbow pennants. This anonymous author concludes his journey in the pre-time and pre-space realm of the Daoist “Grand Primordium.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ While the geographical accounts of paradise featured locations on the frontiers of civilization, these poetic accounts of paradise could be said to reveal the psychological frontiers of thoughts of this era.

²⁰⁶ Kroll explains that “Far-off Journey” was “the earliest substantial poem to be constructed on identifiably Taoist themes” (1996a:653).

²⁰⁷ Kroll writes, “A technical term borrowed from embryology, ‘primordium,’ defined as ‘the first recognizable, histologically undifferentiated stage in the development of an organ,’ is a fit equivalent for the idea behind *ch’u* in this context” (1996a:659).

These poetic accounts of paradise begin with the assumption that this mortal world is corrupt, inadequate, and must be escaped.²⁰⁸ While the paradigmatic Chinese journey is often that of the scholar traveling to the capital for imperial examinations, Bauer explains that “distant journeys, particularly to uncivilized areas, let alone to foreign countries, suggested war, exile, removal from office, or even flight” (1967:181). Thus literature concerning long journeys is often linked with themes of lament.²⁰⁹ While the rapid expansion of the Han dynasty provided for the needs of many, Kroll (1996a:656) proposes that the poet’s inability to play a significant role in the governmental system is a major contributing factor to his desire to travel to the celestial realm. Though this literature serves as a form of escapism for its authors by providing an alternative to the state system, there were still rigidly proscribed methods for traveling throughout the heavenly realms.²¹⁰ This poetry of celestial excursion, like “Far-off Journey,” was the antecedent of the “cult of immortality” and the renown “roaming to transcendence” (*youxian* 遊仙) poems of the Six Dynasties (c. 220-589 ACE) and Tang dynasty periods.²¹¹

Yang Xi (楊羲), a shamanistic priest in the employ of a Nanjing court official named Xu Mi (許謐), composed verses of poems focused on the heavenly realm between 364-370 ACE. Yang declared that these poems were revealed to him by “perfected beings” (*zhenren* 真人) who lived in the previously unheard of celestial realm which he called Highest Clarity (*shangqing* 上清).²¹² Kroll (1996b:181)

²⁰⁸ For more transcendental journeys throughout the heavens see the poems of Wu Yun and Lu Yan (Schafer 1976:29).

²⁰⁹ Bauer explains, “Beginning during the Han period...the theme of lament over the inadequacy of the world was repeated to the point of tedium” (1967:183).

²¹⁰ For example, if one traveled horizontally across the stars they were in violation of heaven’s Way (Schafer 1976:29) and complicated etiquette existed as described in *The Protocol for Lowering and Raising the Head in the Azure Palace of Eastern Florescence* (Kroll 1985:86).

²¹¹ For more on these poems see Kroll (1996a:655).

²¹² These texts were later compiled and distributed by Tao Hongjing (陶弘景), who is considered by many to be the founder of the Shangqing School of Daoism. For more on the Shangqing revelations see Robinet (1984), Strickmann (1977), and Bokenkamp (1997).

explains that one of these perfected beings professed to be the thirteenth daughter of the Queen Mother of the West, was known by the title Lady of Right Bloom of the Palace of Cloud Forest (or Lady Youying), and revealed the majority of these poems to Yang Xi. Yang (and, presumably, the immortal Lady Youying which he channels) is painfully aware that his court employer Xu Mi is “entangled in earthly, carnal desires” (Kroll 1996b:181). Thus the majority of these poems are focused on enticing Xu away from earthly pleasures towards the heavenly delights where Lady Youying has offered herself as Xu’s otherworldly consort. One of Yang’s poems, revealed in 365 ACE, reads:

Reigning in the sky-lights, I settle over Watchet Whitecap,²¹³
 Cantering, prancing above the fords of the Blue Sea.
 A scarlet haze casts confusion over the Greatest Yang,
 As my plumed canopy turns the Nine Heavens²¹⁴ upside-down.
 The cloud chassis drifts in the Hollow of Space;
 In a flash and a flicker – between the wind and waves:
 I have come to seek my companion for the unseen realm,
 Who hand-in-hand with me may serve at the thearch’s dawn-source –
 A regal scion who will concord with my luminous virtue;
 With our heads aligned, we shall summon jade worthies.
 Below, we’ll glimpse the Palace of the Eight Buttresses;
 Above, we’ll rest at the summit of the Rarefield Grove.
 Rinse with these oils of the Rose-gem and Purple Palace,
 Then you shall realize the bitterness of the world’s mire and filth.
 - In what place will the Seemly One reside?
 Devote yourself to it, and you shall gain my intimacy. [Kroll 1996b:182]

This promise of an uncorrupt and ethereal residence is certainly poetic, but reveals little about the location or rarefied life promised in the celestial realm.

A later Shangqing text, *The Purple Writ of Azure Crux and the Aggregate Scriptures of the Golden Root, from Highest Clarity in the Cavern of Realization*, explains in detail the processes by which a Daoist adept can certify their name on the

²¹³ This heavenly locale is near the immortal isle of Penglai.

²¹⁴ These Nine Heavens or Palaces (*jiugong* 九宮) refer to nine points in the brain which were thought, in Daoism, to link the body with the universe.

celestial registers of immortality and the location of this realm itself. Kroll reveals that this transcendent terminus is achieved through retentive visualization where, “At each of the three portals of the Barrier of Heaven the first-time visitor must surrender a jade billet (*yü cha*) containing his name, age, and place of origin. This is his heavenly passport and, if deemed worthy, he is registered in the books of the immortal elect and obtains free access through the gate” (1986:25-26). This scripture also describes the process by which an adept can “spread open” the Barrier of Heaven, which Kroll (1986:24-25) reveals is the Big Dipper’s brightest and final star and the junction between the lower heavens and higher realms of space. Once this Barrier of Heaven has been breached, one can travel to the Heaven of Jade Clarity (Yuqing 玉清), a realm which Kroll describes as the “highest and most hallowed empyrean of all, whose divine inhabitants – unlike those of the Highest Clarity – have never deigned to manifest themselves in our corruptible world” (1986:25). Though this scripture warns in harrowing terms against sharing this information with those undeserving,²¹⁵ other early descriptions of the celestial realm feature the guided journeys of the uninitiated.

A more detailed description of heaven is located in the *Book of Master Lie* (Liezi 列子), a fourth or fifth century ACE Daoist text attributed to Lie Yukou (列圉寇). In this tale, King Mu of Zhou travels to heaven with one of his most revered shamans:

The king held onto the magician’s sleeve, and thus they moved upward directly into heaven. Finally they stopped, having reached the magician’s castle. It was built of silver and gold, with ornaments of pearl and jade. It towered above the clouds and the rain, it was impossible to see what it rested on, it appeared to be piled-up clouds. What the senses perceived was wholly different from what is customary in the world of men. The king thought that he was bodily in the purple depth of an ethereal city, surrounded by the music of the spheres, where the great emperor of Heaven lives. When he glanced down, he saw his castles

²¹⁵ Kroll reveals that those who share this esoteric knowledge with the unworthy are “reminded of the punishments this will bring upon himself – eternal failure ever to attain transcendent status and perpetual slavery for the souls of one’s ancestors” (1986:26).

and summer homes, tiny like mounds of earth and piles of straw. Thus he lingered for a few decades, and thought no more of his empire. Finally, the magician again invited him to continue their travels. At the place where they now arrived, sun and moon above, and the rivers and oceans below, could no longer be seen. The figures of light which appeared were so dazzling that the king was blinded; nor could he hear the sounds that rushed in upon him because his ears were deafened. He almost fainted and nearly lost consciousness, so that he asked the magician to let him return. The magician cast a spell and the king felt as if he were falling into the void. When he came to, he was sitting at the same place as before, the servants waiting on him were the same, and when he looked down, he found that his goblet was still full, and the food still warm. [Bauer 1967:100]

This text represents a trend among fifth century Daoist texts, such as *Three Ways to Go Beyond the Heavenly Pass*, where, “Practitioners increasingly make the heavens their true home, wander freely through the far ends of the universe, and gain control not only over their own life and death but over the transformations of the cosmos at large” (Kohn 1993:257).

Indigenous Chinese conceptions of paradise, from early Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions to later Jin dynasty Shangqing Daoist poetry, have been based on themes of political and religious exclusivity. Though imperial representations of paradise, with their empyrean palaces and royal banquets, eventually allowed the souls of deceased citizenry to enter, it was only to serve the ruling class as they did on earth. One tale from the *Records of Miraculous Retribution* (Mingbao ji 冥報記) reveals that these administrative positions were as difficult to attain in paradise as they were on earth as, “Not one man in ten thousand attains the path of heaven, just as in your district there is not one official of the fifth rank” (Gjertson 1989:200). Though Daoist representations of paradise could convey a sense of autonomy absent from depictions based on imperial metaphors,²¹⁶ they nevertheless featured similarly complex modes

²¹⁶ Kohn explains, “The administration once forgotten, celestials dress up in their fancy garb and dance and sing to their heart’s delight. This, then, is the ultimate reward of the seeker’s quest, the end of the Taoist journey, the paradise won and never to be lost” (1993:334-335).

of access and administration, brief and painfully short unions with the divine,²¹⁷ and devastatingly difficult processes of religious refinement.²¹⁸ These early depictions of paradise, often passed down in poems which were difficult for even the most educated to decipher, would soon be transformed by the transmission of Buddhism into China and its formulations of a paradise readily available to even the most humble Chinese citizen.

Introduction of Buddhism

As the known frontiers of civilization were pushed farther beyond the borders of China, quickly usurping lands thought to be populated by the gods and immortals, indigenous models of paradise were increasingly co-opted by political powers or rejected by religious leaders. The introduction of Buddhism, with its complex and foreign formulations of heavenly realms, provided an initially untainted imaginary to which Chinese citizens were drawn.²¹⁹ Bauer proposes of Buddhist views of paradise, “Precisely because they could not serve as models for the here and now, and contrasted in this respect with the earlier Chinese conceptions of the ideal, they had that degree of remoteness which could assure those who turned their back on this world that the vexations and problems of life on earth would not catch up with them” (1967:159). Buddhism’s otherworldly schema, which Teiser reminds us was “to be seen as impermanent, devoid of own-being, and marked by suffering” (1988:191), was developed not long after the inception of Mainstream Buddhism. Becker (1993:48)

²¹⁷ Kohn reveals that as far back as the shamans of *Songs of the South*, deities were enticed to earth where, “The lover comes, the union is attained, but after a sojourn forever too short the deity returns to the heavenly abodes. The human lover left behind is full of sadness and longing, praying for another chance at such a divine encounter” (1993:267).

²¹⁸ These difficult processes of religious refinement were referred to as smelting (*lian* 鍊) (Boltz 1983:495).

²¹⁹ Bauer proposes of Buddhist conceptions of paradise transmitted to China, “The much richer, even exuberant, if sometimes turgid Indian imagination remorselessly reduced the old, somehow more solidly constructed, yet almost touchingly homespun Chinese paradises to insignificant trifles. That the Indian paradises were much more shadowy, all but fatiguing in their endless repetitiveness, and almost cold in their sterile schematism, was not of much consequence at first” (1967:159).

explains that conceptions of paradise were evident in early Buddhist texts such as the *Kuddhakapatha*, which suggested that a heavenly rebirth and nirvana could be attained through the accretion of merit; the *Kathāvatthu*, which debated the process of merit production through providing gifts to departed spirits; and the *Milindapanha*; which concretized the conception that surplus merit could be transferred to the departed. I will provide a brief Buddhist cosmology before turning my attention to the one representation of paradise which truly took hold of the Chinese imagination, the Pure Land (Qingtu 清土) or Western Paradise (Xifang Jile 西方極樂).

The Buddhist cosmology (*cakravāda*), as found in the Abhidharma literature largely shared by both Mainstream and Mahāyāna traditions, depicts a vertically spatial universe (as seen through the “divine eye” (*divyacakṣus*) of one enlightened). This vertical cosmology can be divided into thirty-one planes of existence found in the three realms (Tridhātu) of Ārūpyadhātu, Rūpadhātu, and Kāmadhātu. This Buddhist cosmological model and its realms of paradise inhabited by devas (*devaloka*) is outlined in ascending order in Appendix 1.

This Buddhist system of paradise subsumed earlier Indian representations, such as the heavenly kingdom of thirty-three gods (Trāyastriśa), formerly led by Indra, inserting them below “superior” Buddhist realms. As Matsunaga proposes of the Trāyastriśa heaven located on earth’s Mount Sumeru, “By placing this Indian category of gods in this heaven...it was possible to handle them as a category subject to birth and death, hence negating their attractive divine attributes” (1969:52). Yet the draw of more tangible representations of paradise could not be postponed indefinitely. While Buddhist disciples were encouraged to meditate on the concept of nirvana, its imageless and transcendent descriptions lacked mainstream appeal. Becker explains, “To make these qualities of nirvana more understandable and desirable, they were first analogized to physical pleasures like the coolness of water or the light of the sun.

Gradually the notion arose that paradisiacal lands actually existed in which these nirvanic qualities were embodied and experienceable” (1993:49).²²⁰

The devas thought to live in these paradises experience extreme – but not eternal – enjoyment. The *Āgama Sutra* (Ahan jing 阿含經), translated into Chinese by Dharmaraksha (Zhu Fazhi 竺法護) around the end of the third century ACE, reveals that when beings are born as devas within the realm of the Four Heavenly Kings, they find themselves seated on the knees of a deva where “there appears of itself a precious vessel filled with Heavenly food, partaking of which the new-born being grows in size like the rest of the Dēvas” (Beal 1871:73). These beings then wash themselves in baths which are surrounded by trees that bend down to provide perfumes and clothing. These trees also provide ornaments for the devas’ hair as well as fruit, food, and pleasure in the form of music. Devas in heaven are often depicted as strolling about, traveling in boats and carriages, listening to music, and eating and drinking extraordinary food and beverages. Yet these pleasures can be overindulged and when these devas enjoy themselves to excess they are exhorted to practice self-restraint and accumulate merit (Beal 1871:79). This is because though these Buddhist deva paradises were lavish, they were also impermanent. As Beal explains, “This they foolishly speak of as Nirvâna, but when the term of its enjoyment is past, then they are born again in one of the equivocal forms of being – even, as it may happen, in Hell” (1871:96).

By the time that Buddhism – with its detailed representations of paradise – was transmitted to China, as Becker details, “It was neither a self-centered asceticism nor an antimetaphysical empiricism. It included concrete images of godlike bodhisattvas

²²⁰ Though this may have made Buddhist depictions of paradise more appealing, I would not go as far as Dore (Vol. 6 1966:111), who has suggested that the reason these Buddhist conceptions of a more tangible paradise spread so quickly throughout China was because its citizens failed to grasp the concept of nirvana.

who compassionately reached across whole world systems to help their devotees, and layers of heavenly Buddha lands intermediate between this realm of rebirth (samsara) and the ultimate realm of selflessness (nirvana)” (1993:51-52). These bodhisattvas, a Mahāyāna innovation, and the Buddha fields which they meritoriously created, ignited the Chinese imagination and soon served as one of the eminent representations of paradise.

Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have taken a vow to assist all sentient beings on their path towards enlightenment and away from the suffering associated with the cycle of transmigration. While the enlightened being in Mainstream Buddhism, a Śrāvakabuddha (or arhat), is free from the cycle of samsāra, they pass into nirvana before assisting others. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, this enlightened being is distinct. As Luis Gómez reveals, “There is no bodhisattva worth his or her salt who does not offer to save living beings from all sorts of dangers and sins if they only call upon this bodhisattva’s name” (1996:140). Becker (1993:50) explains that the formation of these bodhisattvas occurred because of a combination of causes: the formulation of merit transference, the notion that enlightened beings remain sentient after death, and the belief in divine kings. A similar set of circumstances led to the Mahāyāna manufacture of Buddha realms (*Brahmaloka*) and Buddha fields (*Buddhaksetra*),²²¹ locations created by the merit of a bodhisattva in which those enlightened – or wish to become so – can be reborn, undergo dharma instruction, and become a bodhisattva ready and able to assist others.²²²

²²¹ Becker (1993:51) includes four reasons for the development of these Buddha fields: conceptions of the universal monarch and imagery of his mythological kingdom of *Kusavati*, tales of the northern land of Kuru which was said to be located near Mount Meru, representations of the Hindu heavens, and the prevalent worship of stupas as centers of ritual.

²²² Becker explains that while Mainstream Buddhists held that karma would propel one to rebirth in the world causally suited to their past thoughts and actions, “Mahāyāna Buddhists, on the other hand, were now proposing that previous karma not only affected the choice of, but in some sense actually created the whole world into which people would be reborn” (1993:61).

Two bodhisattvas are inextricably linked in the Chinese imagination to the paradises which they rule: Maitreya Bodhisattva (Mile Pusa 彌勒菩薩), who resides in the Tusita heaven and will one day return to earth as the future buddha, and Amitābha Buddha (Ami Tofo 阿彌陀佛),²²³ who was once a monk named Dharmakāra and whose meritorious forty-eight vows (*sishiba yuan* 四十八願) presaged the Pure Land which he was determined to create. Until the Tang dynasty, belief in Maitreya reigned supreme. As Dore reveals, “Primitive Buddhism knew only the heaven of Maitreya...It was for the enjoyment of this happy land that Hsüen-tsang 玄奘 (A.D. 602-664), and other devout Buddhists of his day, prayed on their death-beds” (Vol. 6 1966:111). Hubert Seiwart (2003:127) explains that Maitreya’s paradise, the Tusita heaven, functioned in similar ways to Amitābha’s Pure Land as a “transcendental paradise” available to believers after death. Yet Maitreya’s residence in this Tusita heaven has always been depicted as temporary. In the *Sūtra on the Lion’s Roar of the Wheel-Turning King* (Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-suttanta), which appears twice in the Chinese Buddhist canon, Maitreya is envisaged to appear on earth after the world has gone through a period of dharma decline and resurgence in which people’s lifespan will flux from only ten years to eighty thousand years. This sutra reveals that when the dharma is followed again, Maitreya will appear and rule this world which “will be even and without obstacles, the harvests are plentiful and eighty thousand great cities provide a life free of sorrow and full of bliss” (Seiwart 2003:124).

Although Maitreya was never portrayed in Buddhist sutras as a savior for present generations or those of the close future (Seiwart 2003:125),²²⁴ the aspects of

²²³ This Buddha is, “Alternatively referred to as *Amitāyus* (the Buddha of limitless life) and *Amitābha* (the Buddha of limitless light), both of which are implied by the abbreviated form *Amida*” (Becker 1993:53).

²²⁴ For more on the early Maitreya myth see Nattier (1991).

millenarianism present in Maitreya's mythology were adopted and elaborated by the leaders of prominent rebellions from the Sui (581-618 ACE) to Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties.²²⁵ As Cohen (1988:196) points out, an important distinction between followers of Amitabha Buddha and Maitreya was that rebirth in the Pure Land was generally considered individual salvation, while belief in Maitreya as the Future Buddha implied the destruction of the universe and salvation for all predestined believers.²²⁶ Seiwart reveals, "During the Northern Wei dynasty statues devoted to Maitreya are almost four times more numerous than those devoted to Amitābha. However, between 650 and 704 Amitābha is represented ten times more often than Maitreya" (2003:126). This conspicuous decline, likely due to the association of Maitreya with heterodox Buddhist associations, was also prompted by the "gentle direction of the state, which had recovered its power during the T'ang dynasty" (Bauer 1967:164).²²⁷ As belief in Maitreya Buddha waned, interest in Amitābha and his Pure Land surged.

The Pure Land

If, as Becker has proposed, Pure Land Buddhist beliefs are the "paradigmatic example of a well developed Mahāyāna view of the afterlife" (1993:52), the Sukhāvativyūha Sutra (Amito jing 阿彌陀經), translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva

²²⁵ These rebellions include the uprising of Song Zixian who claimed to be Maitreya and plotted to attack the emperor in 613 ACE, the army officer Wang Ze who led a Buddhist insurgency in preparation for the arrival of Maitreya in 1047 ACE, and the Red Turban Rebellion of 1351 ACE which believed that Maitreya had already been incarnated. For more see Harrell and Perry (1982).

²²⁶ Seiwart explains that according to the beliefs of the Dragon-Flower Assemblies, adopted and elaborated by many sects during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Maitreya would hold three general assemblies of salvation at which ninety-six hundred million, ninety-four hundred million, and ninety-two hundred million people would attain enlightenment (2003:126).

²²⁷ As Cohen proposes, "If, by and large, the Chinese state was hostile to salvationistic heterodoxy, it is perhaps a tribute to state power and influence that such beliefs also were subversive of the dominant form of popular religion" (1988:201).

(c. 402 ACE), is the paradigmatic example of Pure Land beliefs. This sutra is available both in a shorter recension, the most widely read and still chanted daily in temples throughout China and Taiwan, and a longer rendering, which is renowned for its length and narrative complexity but rarely used in ritual recitations. Gómez explains, “The existence of multiple translations offered Chinese Buddhists the opportunity for interpretation based on a variety of sources and therefore removed in part the illusion of a single text” (1996:126).²²⁸ These texts provided a disparate Chinese audience with representations of paradise which were appealing for numerous reasons. In addition to the standard paradisiacal delights found in previous Chinese depictions of paradise, which included extraordinary flora and fauna and lavish banquets provided by deities, the Pure Land offered an eternal paradise from which one could not be demoted,²²⁹ a realm free from all social contracts which could not serve as a model for the “here and now” (Bauer 1967:159),²³⁰ and a paradise which satisfied all of the wishes of its inhabitants²³¹ – not just those sporting royal credentials.

The Shorter Sukhāvativyūha Sutra,²³² which is said to have been taught by the Buddha Śākyamuni in the royal capital city of Śrāvastī in Prince Jeta’s grove, attempts to establish its legitimacy through the traditional description of its divine audience,

²²⁸ For more on the dates and content of these texts see Gómez (1996:128-131).

²²⁹ Dore explains that those who reside in the Pure Land “will henceforth escape all subsequent births. There is no fear of becoming a hungry ghost...or an animal by transmigration, for such modes of life are unknown there” (Vol. 6 1966:111).

²³⁰ Cohen explains of the Pure Land, “This was indeed paradise...here, under circumstances of total bliss, there would appear to have been none of the material and social involvements, concerns, and requirements that loomed so large not only for the living but also – most interestingly – for the dead” (1988:185).

²³¹ Becker explains that a “unique feature of the Pure Land of Amida is that the environment of the Pure Land is said to conform itself to the (nonconflicting) wills or wishes of the individuals therein” (1993:54). These wishes include the ability to raise water levels and temperature for bathing, the wish to hear music or the dharma, the wish to smell any fragrance desired, and the ability to consume any food they desire. This is possible because, “Neither the bodies of the perceivers nor the objects of their perceptions are objectively external, rather, all reality is a projection of mental images...Since there are only perceptions and no physical objects, one person’s desires and perceptions need not infringe on any other’s” (Becker 1993:55).

²³² For the complete English translation of this Shorter Sutra, from which my brief summary is taken, see Gómez (1996:146-151).

which includes 1,250 arhats, an assembly of bodhisattvas, and a crowd of countless gods which includes Indra. Śakyamuni begins by describing the Pure Land to Śariputra, explaining that it is west of their location,²³³ a hundred billion buddha-fields away, and is known by the name of “Supreme Bliss” in which there resides a buddha named Amita. Śakyamuni explains, “Why is that field called ‘Supreme Bliss’? Because the living beings in that realm are free from all forms of suffering and they only experience all forms of happiness” (Gómez 1996:146). Śakyamuni continues his description of this land, which he explains is surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven rows of netting, and seven rows of trees, all made from the four precious substances.²³⁴ This location contains bathing pools which are made of the seven precious substances and filled with water which is always limpid, cool, sweet-tasting, light, soft, placid, healthy, and thirst-quenching. The bottom of these pools is described as being covered with golden sand and accessed by steps made of gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, and crystal. These pools also serve as home to lotus blossoms which are said to be as large as cart wheels, are blue, yellow, red, and white, and described as both delicate and fragrant. Above these pools there are towered pavilions which are said to be adorned with gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, crystal, coral, red pearls, and agate.

Śakyamuni continues his description of this Pure Land, where celestial music is constantly heard, the ground is made of gold, and mandara flowers fall from heaven four times a day. The inhabitants of this land collect these flowers each morning, place them on the hems of their robes, and travel to worship with a hundred billion buddhas

²³³ Maspero (1981:192) proposes that no special symbolic importance be placed on the fact that the Pure Land is located in the West, and explains that its counterpart, the Eastern Paradise of the Buddha Bhaisajyagururâjavaidûryaprabhâsa is almost forgotten.

²³⁴ Gómez (1996:318) explains that these four precious substances are the first part of a larger list of seven precious substances, mentioned in the description of the pools found in this realm, and were interpreted by Kumarajiva to be: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, red pearls, agate, and mother-of-pearl.

who reside in other worlds. Each of the inhabitants of this location returns to the Pure Land in time for their forenoon meal and an afternoon stroll. This land is also home to many rare and exquisite birds, including white egrets, peacocks, and parrots. These birds gather four times a day to sing of the five spiritual faculties, five spiritual powers, the seven aspects of awakening, and of the Eightfold Path. These avian songs assist the residents of this land to remain mindful of the three noble truths.²³⁵

Śakyamuni concludes his description of the Pure Land in the Shorter Sutra by explaining that a subtle breeze blows, which sways the jeweled trees and jeweled nets, producing an exquisite sound like hundreds of thousands musical instruments . This melody also encourages all those who hear it to enjoy thoughts of the Buddha, dharma, and sangha.

Śakyamuni explains that the buddha of this land is called Amita – or measureless – because his light is measureless, and his life-span and the life-span of those human beings who reside with him are also measureless. The number of disciples in this Pure Land is also measureless. Śakyamuni also reveals that, “All living beings born in the Land of Supreme Bliss will progress irreversibly in the path. Many among them are only one more birth away from the full awakening of a buddha” (Gómez 1996:148). As exhortation, Śakyamuni proposes that all living beings who hear this sutra should wish to be reborn in the Pure Land, where they will have the opportunity to meet many people of high virtue. Śakyamuni explains:

If good men or good women hear this explanation of the qualities of the Buddha Amita, and embrace his name, and keep it in mind single-mindedly and without distraction, be it for one day, or for two, for three, for four, for five, for six, or for seven days, then, when their lives come to an end, the Buddha Amita, together with his holy entourage, will appear before them. At

²³⁵ Though birds are typically thought to be an inferior path of rebirth in the Buddhist cosmology, Śakyamuni assures Śariputra that these birds are not born into the Pure Land as a result of previous evil deeds but were created by the Buddha Amita himself because he wanted them to spread the sound of the dharma.

the time of their death, their minds free from any distorted views, they will be able to be reborn forthwith in Amita Buddha's Land of Supreme Bliss. [Gómez 1996:148]

After a lengthy list of buddhas praise the merits of the Buddha Amita, Śākyamuni again exhorts good men and women to steadfastly resolve to be reborn in the Pure Land. This sutra ends when all those divine beings in attendance rejoice at and accept the teachings delivered to them.

The attainment of this miraculous paradise, created by Amitābha's vow to not gain perfect awakening until all humans and gods have attained buddhahood for themselves (Gómez 1996:166-172), represents another fundamental transformation in Chinese representations of paradise. No longer was one required to become a religious scholar, ascetic, or a member of – or servant to – the royal family in order to gain entrance into paradise. All that was required was the sincere invocation of Amitābha's name and rebirth in the paradise of the Pure Land was guaranteed. This "ritual recitation" (念佛), as Gómez proposes, should not be viewed as an entirely novel practice but rather as a shift "in a continuum with earlier practices, found elsewhere in Indian religion, such as belief in the power of names (especially those of divinities), shortcuts to the process of karma (especially devotional alternatives), and the power of sincere devotion" (1996:139). This practice of ritual recitation was also not the introduction of a doctrine of absolute grace.²³⁶ Gómez explains that much of historical and current Pure Land practice is "focused on a type of faith and a theology of grace that coexist – with greater or lesser tensions – with a theology of effort and the practice of meditation" (1996:141). Yet the Pure Land, while in some respects a more convivial and desirable location than earlier indigenous Chinese conceptions of paradise, was not unreservedly accepted by – or available to – all.

²³⁶ Eberhard proposes that these elements of "grace" found within Buddhist movements "may well follow from the experience of bureaucratic absolutism in which it was not clear whether a good deed would receive worldly rewards or at least recognition, or whether a bad deed would receive punishment. It all depended on the ruler and his administration" (1967:20).

Those most notably excluded from this paradise were women and individuals who doubted the Buddha. One of Amitābha's forty-eight vows reveals that he will not gain perfect awakening until all women who have heard his name in the world systems of all the buddhas despise their female bodies and are reborn as males (Gómez 1996:170). Though this misogynous vow is in keeping with the Buddhist tradition that one of the thirty-two true marks of the Buddha was a male reproductive organ, (thus all supremely enlightened beings must be male), not all buddha fields required similar proscriptions.²³⁷ Dore explains of residency in the Pure Land:

Those who have left their families, become disciples of Buddha, and devoted their lives to every kind of religious merit, instantly enjoy the happiness of this heaven; others, though reborn there, are excluded for some time, nay for long kalpas, from the happy vision of Amitabha. During their period of expiation, they lie imprisoned within the closed calyx of a lotus flower. [Vol. 6 1966:113]

Those excluded within the dark calyxes doubt the Buddha – and though these doubters are free from all pain and suffering and are conscious of their surrounding comforts – they remain hidden from the Buddha's light and dharma.

Another issue for the Pure Land's Chinese consumer was the fact that this Buddhist vision of a salvationistic paradise provided an individual alternative to the state-sponsored and collectively endorsed afterlife. Though this was certainly its appeal, as demonstrated by the discussion of Maitreya and that cult's association with heterodox, rebellious movements, it was also one of the Pure Land's detriments. As Cohen explains:

A religious orientation toward salvation in Western Paradise both functionally and logically yielded pride of place among the masses to ancestor worship, the belief in three souls, the ideal and role of reincarnation, and more generally to a conceptualization of the structure and organization of the cosmos which tightly and interactively linked the living to the dead and to the gods. [1988:180]

²³⁷ Gómez (1996:248) reveals that Akshobhya's purified buddha field does not prohibit the entrance of women.

The state, which provided tacit support for aspects of this traditional system of popular religion where “rebirth as a god could be facilitated for those winning the state’s approval” (Cohen 1988:195), continued to worry about the possibility of salvation because it was always linked to a critique of the imperial bureaucracy. Yet these depictions of a salvationistic paradise continued to thrive in both Buddhist and Daoist traditions. Cohen presciently proposes that the protection and continuation of this paradisiacal ideal “within the larger and indeed contradictory framework of mass religion most likely represented a continuing differentiation between personal considerations of one’s own fate and the satisfactions provided by one’s role in society” (1988:201).

Complex Mixture

Depictions of paradise often reflect the individual desires, collective concerns, and institutional affiliations of their authors and participants. The introduction of Buddhist conceptions of paradise allowed Chinese citizens greater access and selection when considering their own afterlife itinerary. As Bauer proposes, “Although of different origins and the objects of ever-renewed attempts at a systematic ordering which yet failed to wholly reconcile them with each other, these various heavens and paradises almost certainly fused in a homogeneous whole where the popular imagination hoped to find the largest possible choice of blissful conditions” (1967:170). With the increased popularity of – and reservations about – the Buddhist Pure Land, Daoist conceptions of paradise were transformed to accommodate changing demands.²³⁸ Bauer explains, “As a result of Buddhist influence, attitudes

²³⁸ Daoist ideas also influenced Buddhist representations of the afterlife. As Zürcher explains, “The impact and integrative force of Taoist ideas are nowhere more clearly manifested than in the development of eschatological and messianic beliefs in Chinese Buddhism from the late third century to the late sixth century AD” (1982:1). Zürcher (1982:2-5) outlines the basic components of Daoist messianism, integrated by later Buddhism, which are composed of a period of crisis, temporal periods which correspond to Heaven’s dissatisfaction with mankind and are marked by widespread destruction by deluge or demons; a messiah, commonly portrayed as a high-ranking immortal such as

toward paradises thus necessarily became increasingly complex in Taoism” (1967:178). These complexities, which featured the amalgamation of Buddhist structures with Daoist elements, included new locations for paradise,²³⁹ modified methods of transmission, and the adoption of Buddhist visualization techniques.

Daoism, following the tradition of paradises set forth by Mahāyāna Buddhism, recorded heavenly journeys in poem and descriptions of these realms in scripture. The Daoist *Scripture of Ascension to the Mystery* (Shengxuan jing 昇玄經) was compiled in the sixth century ACE and expanded during the Sui and Tang dynasties. Kohn (2000:357) explains that this Daoist scripture follows Mahāyāna and Madhyamika patterns of exposition. Written as a dialogue between the Daoist Laozi (老子) and the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling (張道陵), this text also attempts to outline a vision of paradise, with three ranks of attainment, which subsumes Buddhist believers. The highest rank is reserved for Daoist spirit immortals who ascend to heaven in broad daylight and are served by jade maidens and pure lads while lesser ranks are for those who attain residence in the heavenly halls, serve as celestial officers, and are described by this text as the “finders of nirvāna” (Kohn 2000:357), or practitioners of Buddhism.²⁴⁰

Muzigongkou (木子弓口) or Laozi; supernatural assistants, these beings assist the messiah when he arrives; the world as battlefield, a small minority of “chosen people” (*zhongmin* 種民) are preserved during this period; final judgment, the “predestined” or fated (*youyuan* 有緣) possess bodies which bear sacred marks and their names are entered into a heavenly register which allow them to be separated from the majority of humans deemed sinners; and an ideal state, this land is guided by the savior figure through the principle of “non-action” and the inhabitants of this paradise live for many eons.

²³⁹ Of Daoist representations of paradise Bauer explains, “At first, paradise had simply been the endless region of non-civilization, encircling civilization like a ring, escape into which had been relatively easy. Later, when civilization had spread as far as was possible – to the ocean in the east and the mountains in the west – paradise was discovered on the islands in the sea and on the peaks of mountains in the direction of Tibet” (1967:178).

²⁴⁰ The paradisiacal realm of the Azure Lad includes plants and waters of immortality, a jade and rose-gem palace, immortals whose bodies emit a glow of gold and jade, and a community of Buddhists that has been “subsumed” by this realm (Kroll 1985:80-81).

Bauer clearly outlines the complex mixture of Buddhist and Daoist elements present in the writings of the monk Zhi Dun (支遁), who lived from 314-366 ACE and whose written confession outlines both his desire to be reborn in the Western Paradise and his conceptions of that realm:

Boys and girls are born from lotus blossoms, and therefore not defiled by the maternal womb. Inns and houses, palaces and halls are all decorated with the seven treasures. Everywhere, ready to be plucked as if they had grown naturally, the most beautiful things hang from the trees. They are finer than human craftsmen can make. Gardens and parks, pools and ponds shine in marvelous splendor. All that flies and exists in the water exists in natural abundance in streams, lakes and marshes. Up to the time of their death, men live in the company of animals, following their real nature without interference. The entrances to houses are not barred by gates. In the coral woods, the sound of precious stones raises the spirit to heavenly serenity, while dark mists settle as flutes play. As the chalices near the dwellings sway in a divine wind, their fresh sweet dew turns into a strong wine. The fragrance of orchids calls forth virtue, until the aroma is wafted in all directions. Sacred music responds to the stirrings of the spirit until it resembles the roll of thunder. Clouds, born of a swamp of wisdom, hang down until the greatest clarity results. Education and scholarship are imbibed until they express themselves in precious words. "True men" immerse themselves in dark principles until they have shed all that is playful. [1967:162]

As Bauer (1967:162-163) points out, there are many striking Daoist and Confucian elements present in this "Buddhist" conception of the Pure Land. These include the Daoist elements evident in a decreased interest in jeweled trees and lavish palaces and the increased interest in a landscape now filled with edible creatures, the inclusion of a strong wine that arises from dew, the depiction of a life lived in the company of animals, and the mention of "true men." Confucian components include the absence of gates and the value of education and scholarship.

The final mixture of Buddhist and indigenous Chinese conceptions of paradise occurred in modes of interaction with the heavenly realms. Buddhism had long proscribed ritual meditation, which allowed its followers to gain access to higher states of consciousness. As Teiser explains, "Chinese monks were especially interested in a

cosmology in which meditation brought access to the higher planes of existence, the various heavens denoting the realms seen or experienced in concentration” (1988:191). As aspirations to these lofty heights ceased denoting higher states of consciousness and began referencing actual paradises, portrayed as buddha fields in which one could secure a joyful rebirth, these meditative techniques became journeys through these heavenly realms. Becker explains that the *Meditation on Amitāyus Sutra* “tells the practitioner sequentially to visualize jewel trees, flowers, and then buildings of the Pure Land. Thereafter, he is to focus on the Buddha Amitāyus and his surrounding bodhisattvas in minute and attentive detail... Finally, he is told to meditate upon and realistically visualize his own rebirth in the Pure Land” (1993:64).²⁴¹ The ritual preparation for such meditations, as Becker reveals (1993:65), included a limited diet which included only rice and vegetables, the chanting of tens of thousands of mantras, and the sacrifice of sleep for seven days.²⁴²

Daoist control of the cosmos was soon exercised through a similarly intricate ritual of focused visualization. These rituals often began with a process of purification and incantations to the gods of the Big Dipper entreating them to “convey the adept to the heavenly regions, delete his name from the registers of death and make him a full resident among the celestials” (Kohn 1993:257). Texts such as *Three Ways to Go beyond the Heavenly Pass*, suggest that the adept summon the Jade Emperor himself while burning incense and waiting for the sun to rise. The practitioner is then encouraged to “Concentrate your mind and make a strong effort to control your thoughts. Visualize the gods in creative imagination, but do not fall asleep” (Kohn 1993:257). This creative visualization is directed by detailed notes which provide

²⁴¹ For more see Pas (1974).

²⁴² Maspero (1981:194) explains that within monasteries of late nineteenth-century China there were monks who would shut themselves within dark rooms for months or years and constantly chant the name of Amitabha.

followers with descriptions of perfected personages, which should be imagined wearing blue caps, yellow robes, green capes, standing on five-colored clouds, and having a youth-like countenance, and even the interiors of celestial palaces and halls, which should be pictured as gold in color and furnished with an apposite décor.

In my next chapter I will shift my attention from the basic components of Chinese conceptions of paradise to the nature of historical protagonists' interactions with both heaven and hell as recorded in popular literature.

CHAPTER 5

POPULAR CHINESE LITERATURE

There are far too many historical narratives of journeys to heaven and hell in Chinese popular literature for me to include, or even reference, them all. Although this section on popular literature will not provide a comprehensive listing of these stories, I have focused on a sampling of representative tales which provide a general overview of the disparate nature of protagonists' interactions with the afterlife. I will begin with the tenth century ACE *Transformation Text on Mahāmaudgalyāyana Rescuing his Mother from the Underworld* (Mulian jiumu 目蓮救母), which features the monk Maudgalyāyana (Mulian 目連) and includes important innovations to the cosmology of the afterlife while emphasizing themes of filial piety. I will then investigate depictions of the afterlife as they appear in *Journey to the West*, one of China's most popular novels, with a focus on the exploits of the infamous character "Monkey" (Sun Wugong 孫悟空). *Eunuch Sanbao to the Western Ocean* (Sanbao taijian xiaxiyang ji 三寶太監下西洋記) displays an important shift in style and cast for these journeys to the afterlife. Its protagonist, an officer named Wang Ming (王明), is not a Buddhist with supernatural powers but an ordinary officer who is part of a fantastical travelogue. The straightforward systemization of the afterlife found in these travel-inspired accounts is also featured in the renowned morality book, *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* (Taishang ganyingpian 太上感應篇). This text has appealed to a wide audience through its straightforward textual and illustrative depictions of actions and their consequences in the afterlife. I conclude this section with a brief look at the popular collection of ghost tales, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, which employs descriptions of the afterlife in satirical and allegorical criticism of the corrupt Ming and Qing dynasties.

Transformation Text on Mahāmaudgalyāyana Rescuing his Mother from the Underworld

The *Mahāvastu*, Sanskrit for “great story,” was produced by the Mahāsāṃghika School as a late canonical work of early Mainstream Buddhism. Though some of the *Mahāvastu* may have been produced as early as the second century BCE, the preponderance of its contents were probably added near the fourth century ACE.²⁴³ This book, found among the Dunhuang caves, was transmitted to China by 921 ACE and is a “transformation text” (*bianwen* 變文), a “genre which had a close relationship to pictures that were used as illustrations for oral storytelling” (Mair 1994:1093). In the story “Transformation Text on Mahāmaudgalyāyana Rescuing his Mother from the Underworld,” the central protagonist is Maudgalyāyana (or Mulian), a monk who combs the afterlife in search of his recently deceased mother. Maudgalyāyana visits both paradise and the eight “orthodox” realms of hell²⁴⁴ (Mahāvastu 1949:6-21) while interacting with the administrators and inhabitants of the afterlife (Mahāvastu 1949:8).

The story of Maudgalyāyana begins before he became a monk, when the Buddha was still present in the world. At that time, Maudgalyāyana was named Turnip and, about to depart the country to conduct business, ordered that his mother provide vegetarian fare to the Buddhist clergy and beggars that would surely come in his absence. Yet Turnip’s mother hid away the money left to her, lying to her son upon his return that she had provided food to all Buddhists and beggars. When she passed away, she descended immediately to the lowest Avīci Hell for her evil actions and her son Turnip mourned her death for a full three years before leaving his home to become a monk. Turnip, who sought out the Buddha and achieved sainthood as his disciple, is soon given the name “Mighty Maudgalyāyana of Supernatural Power.”

²⁴³ For an excellent and detailed exegesis of the *Mahāvastu* see Rahula (1978).

²⁴⁴ These eight realms of hell exactly match those of the Sarvāstivādins, (see Chapter 3).

Maudgalyāyana first exercises this supernatural power by leaping into space and ascending to the heavenly palace of Brahmā. As the text reveals, “In an instant, Maudgalyāyana arrived at the heavenly court, all that he heard in his ears was the sound of music and drums; red towers²⁴⁵ were faintly reflected on the golden halls, a profusion of green lattices opened on the white jade walls” (Mair 1994:1098). Knocking on the gate, Maudgalyāyana enquires after the state of his mother and father.²⁴⁶ Here, Maudgalyāyana finds his father but is unable to locate his mother. Maudgalyāyana’s father reveals, “Your mother’s activities while she was alive were different from mine. I practiced the ten virtues and the five commandments,²⁴⁷ so that, after I died, my soul was reborn in heaven. Throughout her life, your mother committed a large number of sins and, at the end of her days, she fell into hell” (Mair 1994:1099).

Maudgalyāyana then descends to hell where he first encounters a small group of men and women who, having the same names as others which had passed away, were mistakenly sent to hell. They beg him to inform their descendants that the ritual burning of paper money does them no good and that they can only be saved by the performance of good deeds, referencing donations to the Buddhist clergy (Mair 1994:1100). From here, Maudgalyāyana travels to the tower of King Yāma to inquire after the status and whereabouts of his mother. King Yāma expresses embarrassment that a worthy disciple of the Buddha is spending time in hell and enjoins Maudgalyāyana to quickly return home. Maudgalyāyana responds in reference to his parents, “My father alone is dwelling in the mansions of heaven, but I cannot locate

²⁴⁵ Mair (1994:1098) explains that this means “splendid mansions.”

²⁴⁶ As suggested to me by Steven Sangren, one may not fear their own death as much as they dread the death of their parents.

²⁴⁷ The ten virtues of a Buddhist disciple are: faith, sincerity, devotion to the trikāya, seeking true wisdom, perseverance, moral purity, patience, generosity in giving, courage, and resoluteness (Soothill and Hodous 1937:49). The five commandments for a layperson are not to: destroy life, steal, commit adultery, lie, or take intoxicating liquor (Soothill and Hodous 1937:50).

my dear mother in any of the heavens; in my estimation, she should not even have passed through hell, my only fear is that she may have been unjustly punished by High Heaven” (Mair 1994:1101). Maudgalyāyana is then ushered to the upper part of the hall for an audience with Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, who explains that his mother committed many evil deeds while alive and was thus sent to hell. Ksitigarbha summons his karma-watcher, fate-investigator, and bookkeeper to determine where Maudgalyāyana’s mother has been sent and they explain that the relevant documents are in the case files of the Lord of Mount Tai. Ksitigarbha then sends the two “Boys of Good and Evil” to examine these records and lead Maudgalyāyana to find his mother.

Maudgalyāyana soon comes to the bank of a river where sinners are forced cross. The deceased again plead with him to tell the living that it is only via the creation of blessing and merit through donation of goods to the *sangha* that the dead can be saved. Maudgalyāyana next comes upon the General of the Five Ways who, clothed in golden armor, is directing the torture of beings in hell. One of the general’s attendants explains to Maudgalyāyana that his mother passed through this location three years ago and is now being tortured in the Avīci Hell. When asked why his mother was not given a personal audience, the General of the Five Ways explains that those who practiced the ten virtues and obeyed the five commandments proceed directly to heaven and those who have committed a large number of sins are sent directly to the lower hells.

Maudgalyāyana proceeds to these hells and describes the tortures of each, including the Knife Hill, Sword Forest, Copper Pillar and Iron Bed hells, in gruesome detail.²⁴⁸ Unable to travel any further due to the fierce flames, dragons, and snakes on

²⁴⁸ This tale also clearly represents the complex cosmological mixture of Buddhist and indigenous conceptions of the afterlife. Teiser has labeled the references to hell in this eighth century transformation text “an important stage in the development in Chinese cosmology” (1988:179) as they fall somewhere in between the orthodox Buddhist cosmology and the later tenth century system which

the road to the Avīci Hell, Maudgalyāyana leapt into space in search of the Buddha who he found in the Teak Tree Grove. After listening to Maudgalyāyana's laments, the Buddha gives him his metal-ringed staff, which allows Maudgalyāyana to travel to the Avīci Hell in an instant. On his return, Maudgalyāyana meets fifty ox-head and horse-faced demons who demand that he not come any farther. These demons are quickly quelled with the Buddha's staff and he arrives in the Avīci Hell, which contains fiery gasses, sword trees, knife mountains, fierce fires, sword wheels, iron snakes, copper dogs, metal thorns, iron rakes, copper pitchforks, copper-beaked birds, and many ox-head, horse-faced demons within its lofty iron walls. Maudgalyāyana invokes the name of the Buddha and, "With one shake of his staff, the bars and locks fell from the black walls, on the second shake, the double leaves of the main gate flew open" (Mair 1994:11143). Maudgalyāyana finds his mother in the seventh compartment of this hell nailed with forty-nine spikes²⁴⁹ to an iron bed.

Maudgalyāyana's mother is chained and brought to meet her son outside the gate. Here, "Wailing and weeping, Maudgalyāyana embraced his mother. Crying, he said: 'It was because I was unfilial, you, dear mother, were innocently caused to drop into the triple mire of hell'" (Mair 1994:1115). Maudgalyāyana attempts to convince the warden that he will take his mother's place in hell if she is freed, but the warden explains that each sinner must receive their own punishment and his mother is taken back into hell. Maudgalyāyana collapses to the ground and beats himself until he dies.

The supernaturally endowed Maudgalyāyana soon revives and travels to heaven to once more entreat the Buddha for his assistance, explaining that the most important thing in this world is the affection for one's parents. The Buddha summons

"contains ten separate purgatorial courts and remains a distinctive feature of Chinese culture even in modern times" (1988:180).

²⁴⁹ As Mair (1994:1114) points out, this is the same number of days as the traditional Buddhist funeral service and the number of days that the average soul was thought to take to travel through hell.

Ānanda and his followers exclaiming, “I will go to the infernal regions and save her myself!” (Mair 1994:1119). After the Buddha’s destruction of hell, all former residents were granted rebirth in heaven except Maudgalyāyana’s mother who became a hungry ghost (Mair 1994:1120). Maudgalyāyana was now able to visit his mother, but she was still subject to all of the miseries of a hungry ghost. Maudgalyāyana begs for rice to feed his mother but, when she sees the bowl of rice which her son also means to share with other *preta*, his mother focuses on greedy thoughts and the bowl of rice erupts into flames. Maudgalyāyana’s mother is similarly unable to quench her massive thirst, even in the waters of the Ganges. Maudgalyāyana is then instructed by the Buddha to hold a feast with all Buddhist monks on the fifteenth day of the seventh month in order to better his mother’s condition.²⁵⁰ Maudgalyāyana’s mother is then reborn as a black dog which eats human excrement. After the joint recitation of Mahāyāna sutras for seven days and seven nights, Maudgalyāyana’s mother is at last free from all karmic transgressions and is received in the Trayastrimśā Heaven.

This immensely popular tale resonated with its Chinese audiences on several levels. Most obviously appealing is the theme of filial piety. As Teiser explains, “Given the importance of filial devotion throughout Chinese society, it is hardly surprising that a legend combining the theme of filiality with vivid descriptions of other worlds and cosmic battles should become a standard item in storytelling traditions” (1988:140). This tale also simultaneously plays off, and produces, the feelings of guilt shared between a son and his mother commonly associated with the Chinese patrilineal system.²⁵¹ Teiser proposes that Maudgalyāyana’s tale “is quite

²⁵⁰ This is one textual origination of the Ghost Festival (*Zhongyuan jie* 中元節) which still occurs at this time each year. For more see Teiser (1988).

²⁵¹ A less popular – but well-known – story, the *Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha’s Fundamental Vows* (*Dizang pusa benyuanjing* 地藏菩薩本願經), furnishes a similar story, but features a daughter as the protagonist who saves her mother from hell. This tale takes place before a mythic assembly of Buddhas and bodhisattvas as the Buddha taught his mother the dharma in the Trayastrimśā Heaven atop Mount Sumeru. This girl is one of the many reincarnations of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha and serves to

exceptional in its preoccupation with the state of the mother after death, suggesting a course of action alternative to but not necessarily inimical to the ancestral patriliney” (1988:12). This transformation text also omitted filial acts such as self-mutilation, common in Buddhist *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature, which the Chinese found abhorrent. One Maudgalyāyana tale reveals that his mother stole a turnip from a field and Maudgalyāyana was forced to cut off his own finger, planting it in the place of the turnip, to repay this sin. Though, as Eberhard proposes, this tale “propagandizes non-Chinese virtues and values of a foreign religion and does not reflect Chinese feeling” (1967:9), it was not long before Maudgalyāyana stories in China clearly emphasized filial piety without any mention of self-mutilation.

Another key to this tale’s success in China was its protagonist, Maudgalyāyana, and the gruesomely voyeuristic view of hell which he provided. Maudgalyāyana appealed to a wide range of Chinese audiences. Teiser explains, “Some nuances of Mu-lien’s role appeal to members of the Buddhist establishment, government officials, and other literati, while some of his attributes appeal to nonspecialists – those who belong neither to a privileged social class nor to a

emphasize his magnanimous vow to never achieve Buddhahood until all sentient beings have been liberated from suffering. This mother is said to have practiced wicked ways and slighted the Three Jewels of Buddhism, despite her daughter’s pleas that she reform her ways. This mother passes away and is sent to the Avīci Hell. The daughter, who knows that her mother will reap the consequences of her evil actions, sells her house to buy incense and flowers as offerings to the Buddha. While weeping over the loss of her mother, a spirit appears before the Brahman girl and agrees to take her to hell to search for her mother. After one day and one night of meditation the girl found herself at the shore of a boiling sea. Here, men and women were being devoured by iron beasts and chased by demons. A demon king named Vandana explains that these beings are those without merit and those without the proper funeral ceremonies over the last forty-nine days. When asked by the Brahman girl about the state of hell Vandana replies, “The grand hells are within the three karmic seas. They number in the hundreds of thousands. Each one is different from the others. There are eighteen grand ones, and there are five hundred secondary ones, each and all being centers of immeasurable suffering” (Ksitigarbha Sutra 2002:10). After hearing the name of the Brahman girl’s mother, Yue Tili, Vandana assures the girl that because of her virtuous and filial offerings her mother and all denizens of the Avīci Hell have been freed and have ascended to heaven (Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha’s Fundamental Vows 2002:6-11). This theme of mother saving daughter from the tortures of hell is also repeated in the fourth chapter, where a woman named Prabhacaksuh gives alms to an arhat who allows her to see her deceased mother suffering in hell. Through Prabhacaksuh’s merit from creating a sacred icon, the mother secures a rebirth on earth.

distinctive religious group. It may well be his versatility, his ability to combine different interests in a single repertoire, that accounts for Mu-lien's appeal at all levels of Chinese society" (1988:166). Though Maudgalyāyana's journey maintained a purgatorial focus which "appealed neither to monks nor to those commoners who defined their salvation in distinctly Buddhist terms" (Teiser 1988:191), it's descriptions of violence and retribution were wildly popular among the majority of its readers and listeners. Maudgalyāyana was endowed with the supernatural prowess to travel to hell, but in early tales he remained subservient to the Buddha. Teiser reveals, "Mu-lien's powers alone are insufficient to free his mother from her sufferings in hell. The power of the Buddha or the Dharma or the Sangha is needed for true salvation" (1988:115).²⁵² Popular novels also featured powerful protagonists who traveled to both heaven and hell and were subject to the Buddha's power.

Journey to the West

Journey to the West, one of the "four major classical novels" (*sida mingzhu* 四大名著) in Chinese literature,²⁵³ is the fictionalized account of the monk Xuanzang (玄奘) and his fantastical travels to India.²⁵⁴ The protagonist of this tale, Monkey, was born from a stone egg on the top of the "Mountain of Flowers and Fruit" and is soon made king of all the monkeys. In the introduction, Shi Changyu proposes, "Beating within Monkey is a heart of childlike innocence, unsullied by contact with the vulgar

²⁵² As Maudgalyāyana's tale was transmitted throughout China and continuously edited, his supernatural powers swelled – a process I will discuss in the next chapter.

²⁵³ The other three novels are *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguo yanyi 三國演義), *Water Margin* (Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳), and *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Honglou meng 紅樓夢).

²⁵⁴ Based on his actual seventeen year trip, in which Xuanzang (602-664) studied at the Buddhist Nālanda University and returned to China with 657 Sanskrit texts, this popular tale was first transmitted during the Tang dynasty. The current redaction, first published in the sixteenth century and attributed to the Ming dynasty novelist Wu Chengen (吳承恩), remains a consummate example of Chinese conceptions of morality and desire, popular religious beliefs, and historical satire on the decadence of the imperial system. This novel, which is still required reading for many Chinese school-aged children, was also adopted for film, the Shaw Brother's "Monkey goes West" is one example; television, "Journey to the West" was a live-action TV series; and video games, "Westward Journey" is a current massive multiplayer online role-playing game.

world. He is born from a stone, signifying that he springs from nature, and has no connection with society, and thus has no attachments or fears” (1993:10). It is the fearless Monkey who discovers a cave behind a waterfall, patterned after the hidden Daoist grottos of paradise, and proposes to his cohort, “Let’s all move in, then we won’t have to put up with any more nonsense from heaven” (Wu 1993:11). The satisfaction expressed by Monkey’s subjects with their new carefree life is not shared by their ruler, who realizes that though they are free from human subjugation, death awaits them all. After a gibbon tells Monkey that only buddhas, sages, and immortals are free from the jurisdiction of hell’s King Yāma, he travels to a distant cave to attain enlightenment under the Patriarch Subhuti. Once teaching Monkey seventy-two transformations, how to travel enormous distances on a cloud, and the secrets of immortality, the Patriarch banishes Monkey for bad behavior. With the foresight that Monkey’s mischievous nature may cause him trouble in the future, Subhuti forbids his disciple to ever reveal the source of his supernatural expertise. Monkey joyfully replies, “I promise never to give away a single letter of your name...I’ll just say that I taught myself” (Wu 1993:41).

The autonomous Monkey returns to his kingdom and rules in lavish luxury for some time. One day, after feasting with the other animal kings Monkey took a nap and suddenly found himself being dragged by two lictors to the netherworld. A startled Monkey asks why his captors are dragging him to the realm of Yāma and they tell him that his life is due to end.²⁵⁵ To this Monkey replied, “I have gone beyond the Three

²⁵⁵ Monkey’s experience in hell is mirrored in another of *Journey to the West*’s popular tales. Improperly accused of failing to save the Dragon King, Emperor Taizong is called to stand trial in hell before King Qinquang and released after his testimony clears him of any wrongdoing. When he first arrives, Emperor Taizong meets Cui Jue, a judge in the underworld and close friend of his court official Wei Zheng. Wei had provided a letter of introduction asking Judge Cui to watch for and assist the Tang emperor. Judge Cui, charged by the kings of hell to fetch the Registers of Birth and Death, hurries to his office where he discovers that Emperor Taizong was slated to die that very year. Judge Cui quickly seized an ink-soaked brush and changed the number of years that the emperor was supposed to reign from thirteen to thirty-three before surrendering the register to the kings of hell. The ten kings asked Emperor Taizong how many years he had ruled and Taizong explained that he had already ruled for

Worlds, and I am no longer subject to the Five Elements. I don't come under Yāma's jurisdiction. How dare you grab me, you idiots?" (Wu 1993:62). Monkey eventually wiggles free from his captors, who he immediately kills with his favorite cudgel, before attacking all of the ox-head, horse-faced demons standing in his way. The ten kings of hell, alerted to the mayhem by their frightened guards, rushed to stop Monkey from causing further damage. Monkey, who could not be consoled, demanded to know the names of the ten kings and why they called him to purgatory. The kings reply:

"Please don't be angry, lofty Immortal," the ten kings said. "Many people in the world share the same name, so perhaps the fetchers of the dead went to the wrong place."

"Nonsense, nonsense. As the saying goes, 'The magistrate may be wrong and the sergeant may be wrong, but the man who comes to get you is never wrong.' Go and get the Register of Life and Death for me to see." The Ten Kings invited him to come into the palace and look through it.

Sun Wukong went into the Senluo Palace with his club in his hand, and sat down in the middle of the hall facing south. The Ten Kings then ordered the presiding judge to fetch the register, and the judge hastened to his office and brought out five or six documents and ten registers. He looked through them all one by one, but could not find Sun Wukong's name in the sections devoted to hairless creatures, hairy creatures, feathered creatures, insects, or scaly creatures. Then he looked through the monkey section. Now although monkeys looked like men, they were not entered under the humans; although they were like the hairless creatures, they did not live within their boundaries; although they were like running animals, they were not under the jurisdiction of the unicorn; and although they were like birds, they were not ruled by the phoenix. There was another register, and Sun Wukong looked through this one himself. Under "Soul No. 1350" was the name of Sun Wukong, the Heaven-born stone monkey, who was destined to live to the age of 342 and die a good death.

"I won't write down any number of years," said Sun Wukong. "I'll just erase my name and be done with it. Bring me a brush." The judge hastily handed him a brush and thick, black ink.

Sun Wukong took the register, crossed out all the names in the monkey section, and threw it on the floor with the words, "The account's closed. That's an end of it. We won't come under your control any longer." Then he cudgelled his way out of the World of Darkness. The Ten Kings dared not go near him, and they all went to the Azure Cloud Palace to bow in homage to the

thirteen years. The ten kings assured him he had no need to worry as he still had twenty years of rule remaining and could return to the mortal world immediately (Wu 1993:244-245).

Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha and discuss the report they would send up to Heaven.
[Wu 1993:62-65]

After Monkey's debacle in hell, the ten kings sent a memorial to the Jade Emperor in heaven to ask for his assistance. Though the Jade Emperor wanted to immediately dispatch a heavenly general to capture and punish Monkey, the Great White Planet²⁵⁶ convinced him to summon Monkey to heaven and offer him a celestial post. This imperial edict would placate Monkey and lure him under the watchful eye of the Jade Emperor. The Great White Planet invites Monkey to heaven and, after passing the heavenly marshals at the southern gate of heaven and a cursory glance at the thirty-three heavenly palaces and seventy-two precious halls, Monkey arrives before the Jade Emperor in this poetic description:

As the golden bell tolled, the three classes of divinities approached the steps and submitted memorials. As the heavenly drum was beaten, ten thousand sage kings attended the Jade Emperor. Then they entered the Hall of Miraculous Mist, where jade doors were studded with gold, and phoenixes danced before the crimson gates. Winding arcades, everywhere carved in openwork; layer on layer of eaves, with dragons and phoenixes soaring. On top was a majestically purple, bright, perfectly round, and dazzling golden gourd-shaped finial; below, fans hung from the hands of heavenly consorts, while jade maidens proffered magic clothes. Ferocious, the heavenly generals guarding the court; majestic, the immortal officials protecting the throne. In the middle were set crystal dishes filled to overflowing with great monad pills; agate jars, in which stood twisted coral trees. All the wonderful things in Heaven were there, none of which are seen on Earth: golden gates, silver chariots, and a purple palace; precious plants, jade flowers, and jasper petals. The jade hares of the princes at court ran past the altar; the golden rooks of the sages present flew down low. The Monkey King was fated to come to Heaven, rather than be sullied by the mortal world. [Wu 1993:73-74]

Yet Monkey's stay in this miraculous realm is short-lived. The Jade Emperor, informed by his civil and military officials that there are no vacancies in the palaces or halls of heaven, confers upon Monkey the post of "Protector of the Horses." Monkey soon learns that this post is one of the most modest in heaven and abandoned his post

²⁵⁶ This is another name for the planet Venus.

to return home. Monkey explains to his indignant subjects that he was given a lowly post in heaven and they suggest that he should have been given the illustrious title, “Great Sage Equal to Heaven” (Qitian Dasheng 齊天大聖), which Monkey quickly adopts (Wu 1993:79). An incensed Jade Emperor sends two generals, Heavenly King Li Jing and Prince Nezha, to capture Monkey. Monkey defeats Nezha in battle and the two generals retreated to heaven to report. Again, a furious Jade Emperor demands retribution but the Great White Planet suggests that in order to avoid bloodshed the Jade Emperor could pardon Monkey and bestow upon him the empty title of Great Sage Equal to Heaven. With a residence in heaven but no real responsibilities, Monkey could be watched while not causing any problems. This arrangement works until Monkey, who has spent his free time traveling among the immortal residents and fast becoming acquaintance of all, worries the officials of heaven with his increased influence and they offer him a post as administrator over the heavenly peach orchard.

Though this new post occupies Monkey’s time, it has also put him in close proximity to heaven’s highly desirable immortal peaches. Monkey soon discovers methods for sneaking off and devouring these peaches, an act which goes unnoticed until seven fairies sent by the Queen Mother of the West come to collect ripe peaches for her Peach Banquet. Monkey flies off to determine if he has been invited to this banquet and comes across the Barefoot Immortal on his way to the feast. Monkey convinces him that the banquet is being held in another location, the Hall of Universal Brightness, and transforms himself into the Barefoot Immortal to take his place. When Monkey arrives at the banquet it has not yet begun, but the food and liquor laid out before him is too enticing so he distracts the immortal attendants and feasts and drinks until full. Monkey, who realizes what he has done and the retribution that is sure to follow, drunkenly attempts to fly home but ends up in the Tusita Palace at the top of the Thirty-three Heavens. This palace is Laozi’s residence, and though he is not

present, Monkey enters and finds five gourds full of golden pills of immortality which he promptly devours. Monkey sobers and is now aware that his actions will certainly be punished. He flies back to his kingdom at the Water Curtain Cave where his subjects listen to his tale and applaud his audacity.

The Jade Emperor soon discovers Monkey's heinous crimes and immediately dispatches the Four Heavenly Kings,²⁵⁷ the Heavenly King Li, Nezha, and other marshal ministers to apprehend Monkey. These heavenly hosts battle with Monkey and his subjects without success. The Jade Emperors' nephew, King Erlang, is also unable to defeat Monkey in battle, until he receives assistance from the Bodhisattva Guanyin and Laozi. The captured Monkey is taken back to heaven and tortured to no effect at the Demon-beheading Tower. The Southern Dipper attempts to burn him, but Monkey will not ignite and the Department of Thunder is similarly frustrated (Wu 1993:140-141). Laozi suggests to the Jade Emperor that Monkey be placed in his Eight Trigrams Furnace and reduced to ash, but this only causes Monkey to grow stronger and he at last breaks free from the furnace and causes havoc in heaven once again. Monkey is eventually approached by the Buddha Sakyamuni who subdues and ensnares Monkey beneath the Five Elements Mountain.

Journey to the West provides a carefully crafted picture of these heavenly deities as bumbling, out-of-touch figures who are constantly befuddled by Monkey's trickery. The Jade Emperor and his cronies, who serve as political and social allegory for the decadence and incompetence of the Ming dynasty, secretly support the many monsters in this tale, who serve as embodiments of various social evils.²⁵⁸ As Shi

²⁵⁷ These Four Heavenly Kings are: Vessavaṇa (Duowen Tian 多聞天), Virūḥaka (Zengzhang Tian 增長天), Dhataratṭha (Chiguo Tian 持國天), and Virūpakṣa (Guangmu Tian 廣目天).

²⁵⁸ The best example from *Journey to the West* of a character who embodies social evils is Pigsy (Zhu Bajie 豬八戒) who outlines his history: "I used to be Marshal Tian Peng in the Milky Way. Because I took some wine to seduce the moon maiden, the Jade Emperor sentenced me to two thousand hammer blows and exile in the mortal world. My spirit had to find a womb to occupy, but I lost my way and entered the womb of a sow. That's why I look like this. I ate up my sow mother, drove all the other pigs

explains, “All these demons have their behind-the-scenes supporters, so when they are brought to book for their misdeeds they escape the punishment they deserve...Monkey is incensed, and rails against these scoff-laws. But it is a futile grumble; and he knows that there is nothing he can do about the situation” (1999:14). Though *Journey to the West* features the complex amalgamation of characters and religious traditions common to representations of the afterlife by this period,²⁵⁹ it is only through the power of Buddhism, which offers an alternative to the traditional political and social systems, that these demons are saved and Monkey is eventually subjugated.

Eunuch Sanbao to the Western Ocean

Not all journeys to heaven and hell were undertaken by supernatural Buddhists or written in defiance of state corruption. The Ming dynasty, infamous for its political corruption, also sponsored a series of naval expeditions led by Zheng He (鄭和), who lived from 1371-1433 ACE. Zheng He, originally named Ma Sanbao (馬三保), was from the Hui ethnic group, who were primarily Muslim. When only eleven years old, he was taken captive by the Ming army, castrated, and sent to serve at the imperial court. After providing assistance to quell the Jianwen Emperor (建文), his successor, the Yongle Emperor (永樂), sent Zheng He to sea in an attempt to establish an international Chinese presence. A largely fictitious account of this journey, written by Luo Maodeng (羅懋登) in 1597 ACE, is contained in the text entitled *Eunuch Sanbao to the Western Ocean*.

After sailing beyond the known ends of the earth for an entire month, this naval expedition sights land and an officer named Wang Ming is sent ashore to

away, and seized this mountain, where I keep myself by eating people” (Wu 1993:176). Piggy, who serves as representation of human greed and sloth, begs for Bodhisattva Guanyin’s assistance and is eventually rehabilitated through the power of Buddhism.

²⁵⁹ In *Journey to the West*, Laozi resides in and rules over the Tusita Heaven, replacing Indra in traditional Buddhist cosmology, and frequently meets with the Jade Emperor, Golden Mother of the West, and the Buddha.

explore this new realm. After walking for miles, he comes to a fortified city and approaches its residents, only to find that they have ox-heads and horse-faces. These residents also have snake-mouths, hawk-noses, and blue-green faces. Wang Ming falls to the ground in shock and dirties his clothes. He attempts to wash his attire by the banks of a river and notices someone familiar on the opposite bank, his wife who died ten years earlier. Wang Ming's wife explains that an underworld official named Cui Jue (崔瑑) has kept her in this city as his wife.

This infernal official returns home to the smell of a living being and his wife pretends that Wang Ming is her brother who has mistakenly come to the underworld. The official offers to take Wang on a tour of hell and he explains that this realm is called the "Demon's Country of Fengdu" (Fengdu Guiguo 酆都鬼國) and is located at the end of the world.²⁶⁰ The two first visit the "Platform for Viewing One's Home" (*wang xiantai* 望鄉臺) and the Official, Cui Jue, explains that the deceased are initially taken to the temple of the God of Earth before traveling to the Temple of the Eastern Peak and ending up at the Demon's Country of Fengdu to be judged. When the deceased arrive at Fengdu their hearts have not stopped beating and King Yāma allows them to climb to the top of the Platform for Viewing One's Home after which, "They then cry their hearts out which become dead from now on" (Duyvendak 1952:266).²⁶¹ Near the Platform for Viewing One's Home there is also a "Platform which Ascends to Heaven" (Shangtian tai 上天臺), open only to those deemed worthy by the "Department for the Reward of the Virtuous" (Shangshan fensi 賞善分司). On this particular tour, Wang Ming did not see a single soul ascend to heaven.

²⁶⁰ Duyvendak (1952:265) points out that the most common location for Fengdu in literature is its actual geographical location in Sichuan Province.

²⁶¹ Duyvendak (1952:266) points out the congruity between the heart's death at the Platform for Viewing One's Home and the stoppage of the beating heart in the ritual "Summoning the Soul."

Next, Wang Ming and his guide pass between two large mountains designed to punish the indifferent and the devious, the Mountain of Blazing Fire (Huoyan shan 火燄山) and the Mountain of Spears and Knives (Qiangdao shan 鎗刀山). After passing this Mountain of Blazing Fire, Wang becomes thirsty and sees an elderly lady serving tea. The official warns him that this lady is named Desire (Tan 貪) and she was formerly a prostitute for seven generations who King Yāma will not allow to be reborn. The tea that she serves is called the “soul-confusing beverage” (*mihuan tang* 迷魂湯) which bewilders people just as prostitutes do on earth.²⁶² Cui Jue then guides his charge to a river of blood filled with tortured souls attacked by golden dragons, brass snakes, and iron dogs²⁶³ which can only be crossed on a narrow log. This is the “Bridge over Nai River” (Naihe qiao 奈河橋),²⁶⁴ which must be crossed by all inhabitants of purgatory. King Yāma provides safe escort to those who performed good deeds in life, but Duyvendak explains that “those whose minds have been obscured, whose actions have been deceitful, who have harmed the moral relationships between men, and have acted contrary to the natural order, such wicked and small people...when they come to this bridge they stumble at once in to the river of blood under the bridge” (1952:273).

Wang Ming is next brought to the “Palace of Spiritual Radiance” (Lingyao zhifu 靈曜之府), which houses the courts of the ten kings of hell. Wang Ming notices two buildings, the “Appointed Office for Rewarding the Good” (Shangshan xingtai

²⁶² This women, commonly known by the name Old Lady Meng (Mengpo 孟婆) is frequently featured near the tenth and final court of hell where she serves her “tea of oblivion” to souls before they are reincarnated erasing all memory of their stay in hell. Duyvendak explains of this seductress, “It is clear that in our text the character of this lady has been entirely transformed. She sits at the entrance of Hell instead of at the exit and she causes the souls, upon entering Hell, to forget their former existence” (1952:268).

²⁶³ Duyvendak (1952:272) explains that these are Yāma’s iron dogs, Savala and Sāma, which posses iron mouths that chew nerves and bones to pieces.

²⁶⁴ Duyvendak (1952:273-274) explains that “nai” is the first character in the transliteration of the word hell (*naraka*), the name of a river near Mount Tai, and a bridge in *Journey to the West*.

賞善行臺) and the “Appointed Office for Punishing the Wicked” (Fa e xiangtai 罰惡行臺). Entering the Appointed Office for Rewarding the Good, Wang Ming is surprised to see colored banners, celestial flowers, strange perfumes, and music. Here he finds the “Mansion of Brotherly Devotion” (Tidi zhifu 悌弟之府), the “Mansion of the Loyal” (Zhongjie zhifu 忠節之府), the “Mansion of the Truthful” (Xinshi zhifu 信實之府), the “Mansion of those who were Diligent in their Ritual Conduct” (Jinli zhifu 謹禮之府), the “Mansion of those who put Right Conduct First” (Shangyi zhifu 尚義之府), the “Mansion of those who were Scrupulous” (Qinglian zhifu 清廉之府), and the “Mansion of those who had a Fine Sense of Honor” (Chunchi zhifu 純恥之府)²⁶⁵ (Duyvendak 1952:295-296). The residents within are clothed in celestial caps, clouded clothes, and pearly slippers. The Infernal Official explains that these residents “were all men who had served their parents with the utmost devotion. Several of them, who are historical figures, are mentioned by name and the story of their acts of devotion is briefly told” (Duyvendak 1952:295).

The Appointed Office for Punishing the Wicked contains contrasting mansions to the Appointed Office for Rewarding the Good and houses those who failed to perform each mansion’s specified duty. This location is also where souls wait until the end of three years to be reborn.²⁶⁶ Wang declines visiting these locations, but does inquire after the status of women in the underworld. His guide explains that they are housed within the “Women’s Department” (Nüsi 女司), one side of which is for the virtuous and one side for the punishment of the wicked but this location can only be visited on orders of King Yāma (Duyvendak 1952:297). Wang Ming is at last taken behind these halls, some three to five miles away, where he encounters the “Gate of

²⁶⁵ Duyvendak (1952:296) notes that though these are Confucian virtues, no notable Confucians are found within these palaces.

²⁶⁶ Ritual mourning traditionally concludes at the end of three years when most souls are thought to be reborn.

the Universal Catch-All” (Pulüe zhimen 普掠之門) and the eighteen hells (Duyvendak 1952:299-311). At this point, Wang’s guide is called away to render judgment on the unjust killings committed by members of the Zheng He’s expedition and Wang Ming returns to his ship.

This travel-inspired account of the underworld, not found beneath the ground but at the ends of the ocean, provides little additional insight into conceptions of the netherworld. Though the protagonist’s individual desires to see his deceased wife are temporarily filled, he is quickly obligated to follow his guide throughout hell and provide a systematic description of what he sees. This journey, like Zheng He’s naval expedition, is all business. While maintaining some Buddhist features, King Yāma is depicted as the primary ruler of hell, this representation paints a very bureaucratic picture of the underworld, as if this imperial expedition had discovered and colonized hell itself. Some features from this story, such as the Bridge over the River Nai, the ten kings of hell, Old Lady Meng, and the fact that Wang Ming fails to see a single soul ascend to heaven, remain integral parts of contemporary depictions of hell. Others, like the Appointed Office for Rewarding the Good, the Appointed Office for Punishing the Wicked, and the Women’s Department, are generally not mentioned in subsequent representations. This dry mode of travel-inspired narration and follows in the footsteps of a long tradition of historical cataloguing²⁶⁷ and satisfies the demand of moralists for a strict system of punishment and retribution.

The Most High’s Tract on Action and Response

Morality books (*shanshu* 善書), which will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, outline a quantified system of morality based on the rules of

²⁶⁷ Texts like the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (1999) include lengthy descriptions of the flora and fauna of distant lands.

karmic retribution and are generally distributed for free. *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response*, which is likely the most widely read morality book of the eighteenth century (Eberhard 1967:26),²⁶⁸ is a Daoist text which features Buddhist methods of punishment and Confucian commentaries.²⁶⁹ Paul Carus proposes, “Though it is not a canonical book its authoritative character is universally recognized in China, and it may be regarded as a typical exposition of the moral convictions of the average Chinese. It has become the most important guide of the people's conscience” (1906:5). Carus explains that though this text did not take its current form until the fifteenth or sixteenth century ACE, “It contains passages which are very old, and though we are not prepared to give a detailed analysis of its contents, we will state here that some portions are quite ancient, belonging to the sixth century B.C.” (1906:5).

Although it has been read by many Chinese citizens, some literati felt that these morality books were solely the fare of commoners. Eberhard recounts the story of a scholar who, when passing by a temple in Hangzhou, heard *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* being read aloud and exclaimed, “This kind of book is only good to trick stupid men and stupid women. How can educated persons recite it?” (1967:26). This attitude arose because of the text's simple, straightforward descriptions of moral situations which were often accompanied by illustrations. Yet it is this unpretentious mode of exposition which led to this text's popularity.

²⁶⁸ Carus has gone as far as proposing, in the introduction to the *Treatise on Response and Retribution*, that it “will probably have to be assigned the first place of all publications on the globe,” (1906:3) with the number of its published editions exceeding even the Bible.

²⁶⁹ Eberhard (1967:26) explains that this book, which some claim was written before the eleventh century, is available in the most widely accepted version from 1749 ACE. This newer version contains a long, Confucian commentary for each sentence in which “the editor wanted to prove that this book was in complete agreement with the teaching of Confucius” (Eberhard 1967:26). Eberhard (1967:67-68) also reveals that within later morality books a growth in Confucian attitudes is evident by the fact that it is considered a sin to convince a young person to become a monk or nun explaining, “Basically, here Confucian familism defeated Buddhist asceticism; leaving the family is sinful for a Chinese Confucian, but a meritorious act for a real Buddhist” (1967:68).

Many morality books shy away from detailed discussions of paradise, instead focusing on purgatory in an attempt to curb bad behavior through an explicit display of punishment. *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* is no different, and as Eberhard reveals, "It may be significant that the book has approximately thirty stories about the consequences of good deeds, but over 160 about bad actions" (1967:26). The closest this morality book gets to a discussion of paradise occurs in the tale entitled "Rays of Truth." This story is focused on the Wan family, who had handed down an old and precious copy of *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* for four generations. Although this family was of humble means, they welcomed a traveling Daoist priest into their home. This priest immediately asked where the family was hoarding its treasure as he saw a radiant light upon entering their home. The Wan family assured him that they had nothing of worth but the priest led them to their copy of *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* explaining that this book was a precious treasure as, "All the holy men of the three religions selected and compiled it to point out the way of virtue on which every one should walk" (Lao 1906:84). This priest then assured the Wan family of their immortality, admonishing, "But keeping in sight the heavenly station that awaits you, you must continue to exercise still more self-control in your dealings with your fellow men" (Lao 1906:85). After a lifetime of adherence to the teachings of this book, the family's neighbors "heard heavenly music resound from above, and saw the entire family of Wan ascend to heaven in broad daylight, surrounded by a host of celestial beings" (Lao 1906:85). While *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* fails to provide any detailed information on this celestial realm, the inclusion of this tale focused on the book as sacred object and guarantor of immortal happiness is reminiscent of the Buddhist "cult of the book."²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ For more on the cult of the book in the Mahāyāna tradition see Nattier (2003:184-186).

This self-conscious focus on *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* by its authors is also depicted in descriptions of hell. This morality book features a story entitled "A Visit to Hell," in which a poor and pious man travels out to sea and finds himself stranded on an island. This man, who had always copied and distributed morality books among his neighbors, is soon visited by a Daoist scholar who reveals, "Many scholars are clever enough, yet they do not employ their talents for the true cause; they abuse them in writing immoral, seditious books; but they are now suffering in the infernal regions the consequences brought on them by their own acts" (Lao 1906:99). The Daoist scholar then offers to guide this humble man on a tour of hell.

Then they went through space to that strangest of lands. The Taoist explained everything they saw there. All kinds of torture were being applied to those immoral writers, who, while in the world, stirred up man's beastly nature and allured many good people to an early downfall. The stranger also showed him a stately-looking man in the palace, who had been a good, upright officer when on earth, punishing every crime that tended to disturb social and political peace, and was now superintending this department in the world below. [Lao 1906:99-100]

After their tour was complete, the Daoist scholar returned the pious man to the deserted island where he was at last able to locate a boat and sail home. The story concludes by revealing that ever since the man's return he has been very eager to tell his neighbors about what he has seen in hell.

The Most High's Tract on Action and Response also includes a story entitled "The Impious Magistrate," which demonstrates both depictions of punishment in hell and how conceptions of the underworld can be shaped by popular events.

Wang An-shih, a high magistrate of the Sung dynasty (960-1278 A. D.), was a learned scholar but recklessly irreverent, and so introduced radical innovations in his administration. People complained, officers demurred, and the emperor expressed surprise; but he would say, "Heavenly omens should not be heeded, human discontent need not be minded, and there is no sense in following the ancestral laws." He and his son, who assisted him in his office, even attempted to revive the ancient cruel custom of corporal punishment; but before the law

was passed, the son died, and Wang An-shih built a Buddhist temple on the site of his son's residence. While the magistrate was performing the customary Buddhist rite, he thought he faintly perceived in the flame of a burning candle the image of his son, bound hand and foot in a cangue, crying: "Our attempt to revive corporal mutilation angered Heaven, and I have no chance of getting out of this infernal torture." Later An-shih fell in disgrace; he lost his position and died miserably in exile. Now it happened that soon afterwards, one of An-shih's relatives was taken ill, and swooned, and when he recovered, he said that he had been ushered into a special department in hell, where hung the sign: "Wickedness and Crime Eternally Prohibited," and there he saw a noble-looking man in a cangue, who had gray hair and large eyes. Though he did not mention the name of this unfortunate person, every one around knew that it was Wang An-shih of whom he spoke. [Lao 1906:95-96]

Wang's daughter, worried about the state of her father, asks what can be done to improve his existence in hell and is informed that the only way to assist him is to accumulate merit. The glimpses of paradise and purgatory in *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* are used by the book's self-conscious authors to promote their view of morality. Those who are seen as enemies to this cause, such as the authors of "immoral" books or corrupt officials, are exuberantly portrayed as suffering in hell, while mortality's allies, such as the Wan family, ascend to paradise in broad daylight. Yet not all popular tales of the afterlife so eagerly broadcast their moral mission.

Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio

The final example of popular literature with an emphasis on the afterlife is the well-known collection of ghostly tales *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. Written as a sequel to Liu Yi-qing's (劉義慶) *Record of Darkness and Brightness* (Youming lu 幽明錄), *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* is an anthology of folklore and popular legends collected by Pu Song-ling (1640-1715) which was first completed in 1679 and published in 1740 (Chen 1994-5:136-137). Labeled a "story maniac," Pu often set out tea for travelers and recorded their stories of the strange (Chen 1994-5:137). Chen explains that the late Ming and early Qing was a period of cruel oppression at the hands of the Manchu invaders and, "In such a strict era of

censorship, Pu and his whole family might well have been executed if he had overtly shown his hostility to the Qing rulers with their corrupt officials and other injustices” (1994-5:138).²⁷¹ Instead, Pu used his stories, particularly those focused on corruption, bribery, and unfair examinations in purgatory, as a critique of the ruling Qing dynasty. Chen proposes of the cosmological emphasis of the tales found in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, “They are not tied to a narrow moral outlook, nor shaped according to the demands of Confucian ethics or Buddhist and Taoist moral teachings; in them, fancy ranges freely, subject only to the dictates of those great arbiters of Chinese life – chance and coincidence – and of human nature, the darker side of which is not glossed over” (1994-5:144).

Not surprisingly, this fanciful and fantastical literature also features much looser cosmological details than morality books or travel-inspired literature. Paradise is mentioned only briefly and often appears as a brief journey to a fairy grotto, the Dragon King’s palace, or as a fleeting sensual encounter between a lonely scholar and a fox maiden. In a story entitled “The Land of Locha,” the merchant Ma-zhun happens upon a distant city where the ugliest citizens are the highest officials (Pu 1946:182). From here, Ma travels by boat to the Dragon King’s palace, which featured “beams of which were made of tortoise-shell and the tiles of fishes’ scales. The four walls were made of crystal, reflecting images and dazzling the eyes” (Pu 1946:189). Though Ma becomes famous for composing a beautifully crafted thousand-word poem, marries the Dragon King’s daughter, and becomes an officer of the state, he soon misses his parents and wishes to return home. Ma’s tension between loyalty to his spouse and piety towards his parents is finally resolved as he returns home. After some time, Ma wishes to return to the Dragon King’s palace and his wife, yet this is no longer

²⁷¹ These tales, written to avoid political censorship, may have also avoided Pu’s and other contributors’ psychological censors as they sometimes portray sublimated and socially taboo desires.

possible and he is forced to stay in the mortal world forever (Pu 1946:197). This sense of loss, which often accompanies tales of paradise in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, represents Pu's satire of the desperate search for the hidden and mysterious realms of paradise. The imperial search for immortality and magic is also mocked by Pu in the tale "The Guardian Immortal's Sleeve." In this story, an immortal produces heavenly delights, literally hidden up his sleeve, for the Prince of Lu:

Then, feeling in his sleeve, he drew forth a beautiful woman and placed her on the ground. She turned to the prince, bowed low to him, and at the priest's direction sang, as in the Fairyland of the Queen Mother of the West, a song wishing ten thousand years of life to the prince; then she advanced to speak with him. The priest drew forth another fairy who said she was the Queen Mother herself. In a little while many singers, one by one, appeared. Finally came the Weaving Girl; she brought a heavenly robe of glittering gold which brightened the whole room as with sunshine. [Pu 1946:244-245]

Pu's ironic and sarcastic tone is carried to his descriptions of purgatory within *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*.

Hell in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* is described as a place of judgment. Here, "Guan yu, the historical figure of the Three Kingdoms Period (A.D.220-280) is seated as the Judge of Purgatory, and the Hall of Judgment in purgatory is quite like a human official's office" (Chen 1994-5:140). The punishments featured in these infernal courts, found in tales such as "Xu Huang-liang," are very similar to those in previously outlined representations of purgatory and include boiling oil, the consumption of molten metal, and Knife Mountain (Chen 1994-5:141-143). Many of Pu's purgatorial tales underscore the cronyism and corruption in the imperial polity and examination systems. Others, such as "The Rebirth of Shiao-shieh," depict the underworld as a location to which the helpless can turn in a time of need. Tao Wang-san, this story's protagonist, is a scholar who does not believe in ghosts. After composing a heartfelt essay disproving the existence of ghosts, a local official allows Tao to stay in a haunted building. Although ghosts appear to Tao, he was not afraid

and soon began teaching them how to read and write. The official is so pleased when he hears this he decides to award Tao a salary (Pu 1946:166). Tao soon departs to take the imperial examination, despite his ghost student's warning that evil will befall him on his journey. Before departing, Tao had previously written some satirical poems on current affairs. An official in the area was angered by these poems and bribed Tao's examiner to accuse him of improper conduct. Tao was jailed and tortured until one of his ghost students, San-lang, appeared in the earthly court to appeal on his behalf before suddenly vanishing. Tao was released on the strength of this ghost's testimony and "When San-lang suddenly vanished before the judge, he was taken by the guardian-god of the city before the Court of the Underworld, and the Ruler of the Underworld ordained that he now be reborn into a family of nobility, as a reward for his loyalty" (Pu 1946:168).

From grotesque tortures and ox-head, horse-faced demons to jeweled forests and pills of immortality, representations of the Chinese afterlife are both enthralling in their own right and revealing of the collectives and individuals which produced and participated in these imaginaries. Collective concerns can be seen in Emperor Huizong's Daoist cooptation of the afterlife's pantheon, the Chinese state's hostility towards salvationistic heterodoxies associated with Maitreya Buddha, and the nationalism which crops up in 14 century ACE accounts of the afterlife which feature a "special section in the system of hells, the lowest of all, in which we find traitors" (Eberhard 1967:67). Individual desires are present in authors' wishes to escape state power and control, evidenced in Tao Qian's description of the Peach Blossom Spring in which young and old are equally content, to cheat death, present in stories like "Wen-ho meets the Shade of His Wife-to-be" or "The Debater Offers a Substitute to Death" where the deceased is either mistakenly called to the underworld or able to argue their way back to life, and the chance to right everyday injustices, demonstrated

most clearly in Pu's short stories which "interpret the religious doctrine of karma as a quest for social justice" (Chen 1994-5:149). I hope that this historical section has also shown that the three ethnocentric misconceptions lingering in academic literature concerning conceptions of the afterlife – that Chinese citizens are somehow uniquely predisposed, at a disadvantage, or that these conceptions were never considered to be ontological realities – are groundless. I will now use this brief historical outline to track the continuities and changes in contemporary conceptions of the afterlife in my final section.

PART III

CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS OF THE CHINESE AFTERLIFE

When I first visited the island of Taiwan in 1998, I arrived in the midst of a supernatural maelstrom. 1997 was labeled the “year of religious disorder” after a group of young women participating in a religious retreat at the Chungtai Zen Monastery decided to shave their heads and become nuns without parental permission, religious master Song Qili sold doctored photos of a supernatural light and his own spirit for exorbitant amounts of money and was subsequently linked to Chairman Frank Hsieh of the Democratic Progressive Party, religious master Miaotien was caught selling spaces in an illegally constructed columbarium for NT\$1 million, and the martial arts association Taiqi Men was accused of casting evil spells and officially charged with being an “evil organization” (Li 2000; Nickerson 2001). A new genre of popular television shows featuring firsthand accounts of ghostly incidents was also extremely popular in Taiwan during the 1990s. The first of these shows was called “Ghost Talk” (Guihua lianpian 鬼話連篇) and was a regular feature on Taiwan TV’s “Night of the Roses.” The success of “Ghost Talk,” which doubled its network’s viewers the night it aired, has spawned similar shows with titles such as, “ESP Encounters” (Jiechu diliugan 接觸第六感), “Nightly Madness” (Heise xingqi wu 黑色星期五), and “The World of Spirits” (Xinling shijie 心靈世界) (Tsai 1996:93-94).²⁷² Why was this television programming and interest in ghosts, which never would have been broadcast or allowed in Taiwan during the 1960s and 1970s because of its perceived threat to national security, flourishing nationwide?

As a student educated in the rationalism of critical theory, I was intrigued by this phenomenon but couldn’t really grasp the fascination with ghosts and the

²⁷² One of these program’s participants stated that “hunting for ghosts is as good as downing an ice-cold cola” (Tsai 1996:95).

supernatural. In the French film *Les Diaboliques* (1955), the mistress and murderer of a sadistic headmaster asks his wife, “Do you believe in hell?” Her response, “Not since I was seven,” reflects my basic attitude towards the afterlife, and that of many contemporary Taiwanese citizens.²⁷³ Yet for many others, the supernatural realm serves not just as an escape from the world but also as a means to codify a lived reality.²⁷⁴ The lived reality for many citizens of Taiwan in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is that of political instability, economic turbulence, and social unrest.²⁷⁵

To which representations of the afterlife are Taiwanese audiences most exposed? Morality books are distributed at religious bookstands island-wide and serve as primers on religious realms and social responsibility for many Taiwanese. *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* (Diyu youji 地獄遊記) and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (Tiantang youji 天堂遊記), produced by Taizhong’s Hall of the Sages and Worthies (Shengxian tang 聖賢堂), are the most influential examples of this genre.²⁷⁶ These books were authored and illustrated by Yang Zanru, one of Taiwan’s most prolific spirit-writing mediums (see Clart 1996).²⁷⁷ Depictions of horrific punishments appear throughout sixty-two journeys to purgatory and magnificent rewards are detailed in thirty-six trips to paradise. Though much of

²⁷³ While living with a dentist and his family in southern Taiwan, Dr. Chen* frequently referred to the supernatural as “a world where nothing really exists” (*wuhe youzhixiang* 無何有之鄉), an idiom ascribed to Zhuangzi.

²⁷⁴ Obeyesekere explains that the construction of an afterlife “must in some respects be based on the social structure of an actual human society of which the individual has had direct experience. Anthropological evidence confirms this fact. The other world is usually credited with characteristics of the mundane social structure or of some idealized version of the mundane reality” (1968:13).

²⁷⁵ As LaFleur states, “Ghosts and ghouls may be odd in any age; historical inquiry is interested in why they are less odd in one era than in another” (1989:272).

²⁷⁶ *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* is available in English. For a translation of the first chapter of *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* see the Appendix 2.

²⁷⁷ Pas (1989:50) proposes that three morality books stand out as particularly revealing of the afterlife, *Precious Records of the Jade Emperor* (Yuli baochao 玉曆寶鈔), *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworlds* (Dongming baoji 洞冥寶記), and *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*.

Taiwan's assumed moral decay is attributed to the relaxed attitude toward educating younger generations, expressed in the elderly lament "Education today is not sufficient" (*jiaoyu bugou* 教育不夠), these books address the moral and immoral actions of both children and adults. Purgatory is employed as a disciplining tool for naughty children called "little ghosts" (*xiaogui* 小鬼), whose evil actions karmically condemn them and their parents to hell, while paradise is held as lofty ideal for well-behaved children, labeled "little bodhisattvas" (*xiao pusa* 小菩薩). In these books, adult fans of pop music, deemed sinful, are attacked by large poisonous bees, irresponsible drivers are forced by menacing demons to drag heavy carts up and down rocky hills in a supernatural Department of Motor Vehicles, and unscrupulous business owners are disemboweled by the iron dogs of hell. Correspondingly, paradise reunites households in carefree settings where children are praised for karmic discretions and the elderly are whisked about heaven in sedan chairs.

In addition to *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, there are at least twenty-one contemporary spirit-travelogues (Zheng 1988), including *Record of a Journey to the Netherworld* (Ming youji 冥遊記), which was written in 2005 and features contemporary concerns such as SARS (2005:110). Morality books are produced through a process of possession called "spirit-writing" (Jordan and Overmyer 1986). The author of these texts, in trance, stands before the congregation and writes characters through means of the "planchette," a forked stick and shallow tray of sand. These characters are interpreted by two scribes and read aloud to those in attendance. Before being published, spirit-writings are distributed with an explanation by temple officials and reviewed in a weekly class for all temple participants.

There are three mythological theme parks in Taiwan that prominently feature scenes of heaven and hell. The Palace of Southern Heaven (Nantian Gong 南天宮) in

Zhanghua was opened in 1971. This theme park was originally owned by a Mr. Huang, who passed away in 1999 at the age of 86, and is now owned by his son who rarely visits. The Palace of Southern Heaven was constructed and opened with cooperation from officials at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven (Dai Tianfu 代天府) in Madou, which created its own animatronic scenes of the afterlife in 1982. The Prefecture that Represents Heaven includes eighteen separate purgatorial scenes, while the Palace of Southern Heaven has ten. Each representation is similar, beginning with the 1st Court's Mirror of Retribution. This Mirror, in which the deceased is forced to watch all of their earthly sins, is portrayed at the theme park in Madou by actual explicit photographs of a partially clothed couple, projected onto the Mirror from a video projector mounted to the ceiling. Courts two through nine feature socially disruptive sins punished according to the principle of cause and effect.²⁷⁸ Greedy officials who abuse their authority and make life uncomfortable for the general populace are continually beheaded; girls who read worthless books have their eyes gouged out; those who produce fake medicines and counterfeit alcohol are boiled in woks; those who fail to show proper respect to their parents or elders are ripped apart on Knife Mountain; and those who lie or curse heaven are cut apart with large saws. Mother Meng resides in the final court and serves her "soup of oblivion" to all souls before their reincarnation. The Pure Land Cave (Qingtu Dong 清土洞) depicts scenes from Amitābha's Buddhist paradise. It is located at Taiwan's largest Buddhist monastery, the Light of Buddha Mountain (Foguang Shan 佛光山), and was created after the monastery's founder, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, visited Disneyland in 1972.

²⁷⁸ The sins commonly portrayed in hell upset social norms by blurring the lines of ownership and have been labeled "crimes of extraction" by Orzech (1994).

CHAPTER SIX

TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE

In this chapter, I will focus on the two most popular contemporary texts concerning conceptions of the afterlife in Taiwan, *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* (1978) and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (1981). Yet before I investigate these texts, which both belong to the subgenre of morality books labeled “spirit-travelogues” (*youji* 遊記), I will begin by exploring the secondary literature associated with the broader genre of morality books from which these texts are derived.

Morality Books

The most common definition of “morality books” (*shanshu* 善書) comes from Sakai Tadao’s (1960) groundbreaking study, in which he characterizes them as “books exhorting to goodness” (*quanshanshu* 勸善書) (Clart 1996:3; 2005:102). Clart proposes, “This definition has the advantage that it draws attention to the exhortatory nature of morality books. A *shanshu* is not an abstract scholarly treatment of morality, but first and foremost a didactic text, whose purpose it is to propagate morality” (1996:3). The earliest recognizable ancestor of these morality books is generally acknowledged to be *The Most High’s Tract on Action and Response*, which I outlined in my fifth chapter. Originally published in the twelfth century (c. 1164),²⁷⁹ this text was endorsed by an emperor of the Southern Song dynasty a century later and thousands of copies were published and distributed throughout the empire (Ling 2005:203, n. 1). Because this text is attributed to a deity called Most High Lord Lao (Taishang Laojun 太上老君) it was probably produced through some mode of

²⁷⁹ The Most High’s Tract on Action and Response was published around 1164 with a commentary by the literatus-official Li Changling 李昌齡 (Clart 1996:4).

revelation (Clart 1996:4), a mode of production shared with many later morality books.

Most morality books are comprised of a complex and changing religious amalgam which, as Clart explains, is generally “representative of the religious consensus of late Imperial China” (2005:102).²⁸⁰ Ling Chi-shiang states, “Morality books not only prescribe the moral duties that people should do, but also provide a religious worldview, in which these moral duties acquire their religious meaning and justification, and are also associated with rewards and punishments” (2005:203). These moral duties, religious worldviews, and rewards and punishments are predominately culled from China’s “three religions” (*sanjiao* 三教), Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, as well as popular religion²⁸¹ and – at least superficially – from foreign traditions like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.²⁸² Clart proposes that the morality advocated in these *shanshu* is predominately Confucian because of its emphasis on “filial piety, loyalty, chastity, righteousness, and the other virtues that are associated with Confucianism but that have become part of the Chinese worldview transcending all denominational boundaries” (2003a:85).²⁸³ These Confucian-inspired ethics, which Clart (2003b) has labeled “popular Confucianism,” are also found on the

²⁸⁰ These teachings were concretized during this period by authors responding to the unprecedented social mobility, powerful merchant class, and expansion of literacy and education (Clart 1996:3) exemplified throughout the dynasties from the Song to the Qing. Clart explains, “The class-bound differential ethics of medieval society was replaced by generalized norms of moral conduct applicable to all classes. The homogenization of values was accelerated by the spread of printing which made knowledge more generally accessible than ever before” (2005:103).

²⁸¹ The exclusionary heuristic of the “three religions” ignores much of what is considered “popular religion.” These overlooked actions include offerings to ancestors, funerary rituals, and disparate forms of shamanisms, such as consultation with a spirit medium.

²⁸² Ling explains, “Traditionally, morality books advocate the ‘Three Teachings’ and see them as a unified one. Today, this Trinitarian paradigm is explicitly broadening by some modern Taiwanese morality books to include Christianity and Islam (and other religions). While borrowing little from Christianity and Islam, these texts affirm the morally exhorting function and transforming power of these two religions and grant them a place within the religious vision of Chinese popular belief” (2005:212).

²⁸³ Ling has echoed this sentiment proposing, “The moral norms and standards in morality books are predominately derived from Confucian ethics, which are concerned with building a harmonious society in which each persons can develop oneself and become a fully human being” (2005:207).

Chinese mainland and have been noted by Madsen (1984:12) to include an emphasis on a general regard for “human feelings.” As native scholar Song Guangyu reminds us, the teachings found within morality books are not just Confucian. He explains, “This type of morality originates from Buddhism and its content has been adjusted along with society’s changes. How can we say that Chinese people’s morality only originates from the Confucian tradition?” (Song 1984:3). There is also plenty of *shanshu* content inspired by Buddhism: the regimented system of reward and punishment, Buddhist personages (like Amitābha) and locales (like the Pure Land), and the inclusion of many animal characters and narratives.²⁸⁴ Finally, Daoist contributions include discussions of aging, immortality, nature, and the “grand primordium.”²⁸⁵

The mixture of disparate traditions (and creation of new religious innovations) featured in contemporary morality books have been labeled “syncretic” by many scholars (Jordan and Overmyer 1986; Ling 2005; Clart 2003b). While Ling (2005:212) proposes that morality books are syncretic because their creators combine elements from different religious traditions and “overlook” their incompatibilities, Jordan and Overmyer suggest a different approach. They state:

All human culture is syncretic. What is of interest in the Chinese case is the second sense of “syncretism,” which is the *self-consciousness* of historical syncretism, the intellectual defense of the *desirability* of historical syncretism, and even the delight in, as it were, wallowing in historical syncretism. This *self-conscious* use of diverse materials we can call “ideological syncretism” to distinguish it from mere “historical syncretism.” [Jordan and Overmyer 1986:9]

²⁸⁴ As Ling (2005:208-209) explains, Confucian teachings focused almost entirely on proper actions between humans, not the human animal relationships found in many morality books.

²⁸⁵ Teiser explains, “For Daoists the philosophical equivalent to the pre-imperial primordium is a state of chaotic wholeness, sometimes called *hundun*, roughly translated as ‘chaos.’ In that state, imagined as an uncarved block or as the beginning of life in the womb, nothing is lacking. Everything exists, everything is possible” (1996:8).

Anthropologists Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (1994) have recently called for a rehabilitation of the term syncretism, lauding its emphasis on the surrounding derogatory discourse, to investigate mixture. Yet syncretism's pejorative connotations, which originated during Catholicism's 16th and 17th centuries' "Syncretic Controversies," persist as the term clings to its denotation of impurity and inauthenticity, particularly in cases of religious mixture. These Controversies, which spread all the way to China in the 17th and 18th century "Rites Controversy," can still be found in the contemporary academic discourse; present in the uncritically accepting bifurcation of "purity and danger" in the works of historians of religious like Mary Douglas (1966). Because neither purity nor danger (impurity) is sufficient to fully explain the complex modes of religious mixture and production in China, and because heuristics such as syncretism continue to convey some sense of favoritism when religious traditions combine, I would argue that the idiom "syncretism" should not be adopted.

For a sufficient term, scholars of East Asia have also turned to the natural sciences (Dean 1998; Yang 2000). Hybridity, a term utilized by both Biology and Botany, refers to breeding from two distinct species or a crossing between two plants with different genetic constituents. This paradigm shift, an analytical step in the right direction, avoids only some of syncretism's theoretical pitfalls. With a lessened emphasis on inauthenticity, hybridity still highlights impurity (Douglas 1966:66), implies a preexisting dichotomy present before mixture (Young 1995:79) and allows for the negation of the influence of production and surplus (Yang 2000). The term complexity, on the other hand, provides the conceptual framework necessary to accommodate mixture while avoiding these implicit negatives.²⁸⁶ In their discussion of

²⁸⁶ An excellent example demonstrating how the term complexity can be used to explain religious mixture can be found in A. Thomas Kirsch's *Complexity in the Thai Religious System* (1977). Dell

the “syncretism” present in morality books, Jordan and Overmyer propose, “There is no blurring of sources, and no attempt to elevate one contributing font above another” (1986:10). Instead of “ideological syncretism,” which implies impurity and favoritism in mixture, the simple heuristic “complexity” seems much to more closely convey what scholars like Jordan and Overmyer intended.

The target audience for the complex mixture of morality advocated in *shanshu*, currently distributed for free across Taiwan in private locations like religious temples and public sites like bus stops, ranges from adult to child,²⁸⁷ educated to illiterate,²⁸⁸ wealthy to impoverished, and female to male. This is because it is the stated mission and “divine charter” of those who produce and publish morality books to reach as broad an audience as possible (Brokaw 1991:216; Jordan and Overmyer 1986:80). To facilitate this propagation, morality books have been written in simple classical Chinese²⁸⁹ and colloquial Chinese, have included illustrations or were entirely illustrated in comic book format,²⁹⁰ and can be found on the internet.²⁹¹ Yet for years, researchers were left guessing who actually read these widely available morality

Hymes has also supported this mode of investigation of what he terms “complex phenomena” (1969:42).

²⁸⁷ Clart explains that morality books were used in private and public lectures “while school teachers employed *shanshu* as supplementary textbooks” (2005:103).

²⁸⁸ Eberhard proposes, “Although books like this...are clearly written for the less educated, we know that many highly educated men in the later years liked to read the more sophisticated editions” (1967:27). Brokaw also reveals that these morality books also included sections called “encouraging moral transformation” (*quanhua* 勸化) which revealed that “it was the responsibility of scholars and gentry to perform the important function of transmitting the prescriptions and moral lessons of the morality books to the rest of the population. They were to ‘endeavor to improve manners and customs’ and to ‘explain books on moral retribution’ to the common people” (1991:216).

²⁸⁹ Brokaw explains, “The language used in the ledgers also suggests that they were written for use by as wide a readership as possible. Though written for the most part in classical Chinese, it is in many cases a classical Chinese so simple as to be accessible to anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of the language” (1991:217).

²⁹⁰ *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, rendered as a comic book by its author Yang Zanru, is located online at <http://delta.xxking.com/hell/>. I will focus more attention on these illustrations, particularly those concerning the afterlife, in my final chapter.

²⁹¹ *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* can be found at <http://www.webhope.info/> and <http://www.chinamorality.org.hk/big5/publication/> and an English translation of *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* is also online here <http://www.scribd.com/doc/104731/Journey-to-the-Underworld>.

books. Ling (2005:213-215), utilizing data from the 1999 Taiwan Social Change Survey,²⁹² recently completed a groundbreaking statistical analysis which revealed that just over 40% of Taiwanese citizens between the ages of 20-64 have never read a morality book, around 60% of Taiwanese people have read some sort of morality book, and about 15% have read several or lots of morality books. Ling (2005:216) also states that nearly 12% of those questioned have funded the printing of morality books, females are slightly more likely to read morality books than males, and those with a college education are more likely to read morality books than those without. While this study is certainly not complete, notably neglecting Taiwanese younger than 20 and older than 65, it does reveal that the majority of those surveyed asserted to have read at least one morality book.

Ling's statistical analysis also answered – as well as it was able based on the limited scope of the data employed – the question of how influential *shanshu* teachings of morality are on their readership. Many scholars have previously expressed their doubts as to how effective morality books are at actually affecting actions. Eberhard sums up this position with his proposition that social institutions and their literature “aim at creating predispositions for certain ways of behavior, but it is understood that not all individuals, perhaps not even always the majority, will really act according to these predispositions” (1967:5). Ling is less pessimistic explaining, “Since morality books have been used for centuries to spread religious and moral instructions, these texts might effectively instill the ideas contained in them in their readers” (2005:215). Ling explains that the 1999 Taiwan Social Change Survey demonstrates:

That there are significant positive relationships between reading morality books and believing in the existence of a highest God, the idea of karma and

²⁹² This survey was sponsored by the Taiwan National Science Council and conducted by the Institute of Sociology and the Office of Survey Research at the Academia Sinica.

reincarnation, and the existence of heaven and hell, and believing that doing good will change one's fate in this life as well as that one's conduct will influence the fate of one's descendants and one's next life. [2005:217]

Despite the positive correlation between reading morality books and a belief in doing good deeds, *shanshu* may not influence behavior so much as serve as an indicator of an individual's pre-existing, moral proclivities. Ling explains, "Morality books may not be successful in introducing *unconventional* beliefs and practices, but may nevertheless be effective in instilling and reinforcing *traditional* ones" (2005:218).

Spirit-writing

One method for producing morality books is a mode of mediumship called "spirit-writing" (*fúji* 扶箕/扶乩 or *fúluàn* 扶鸞).²⁹³ When a morality book is composed through spirit-writing, a medium (or mediums) generally enters into trance and, "possessed" by a deity, answers individual questions or communicates to a congregation. This communication occurs through several methods: one or two mediums may hold a Y-shaped stick and trace characters in the air or in a tray of sand or ashes, two mediums may hold a spirit sedan chair whose leg is used to trace characters on a table top, or a three-pronged stick may be suspended from the rafters and trace characters when the deity descends (Chao 1942:9; Morgan 1998:10; Thompson 1982:98; Jordan and Overmyer 1986:32-33).²⁹⁴

The history of the creation and transmission of religious and moral teachings through spirit-writing can be traced all the way from the Song dynasty to contemporary Taiwan (Zeitlin 1998:103).²⁹⁵ Kleeman (1994:8) explains that the earliest irrefutable reference to spirit-writing dates from the tenth century and is found

²⁹³ This, as Clart has explained, is certainly not the only method to produce morality books. "There exists a continuous tradition of revealed morality texts stretching from the Song to the present day. There also exists, however, an equally continuous tradition of morality literature produced by human authors" (Clart 2005:103).

²⁹⁴ For more on spirit-writing see Groot (1967 Vol. 6) and Gary Seaman (1978). Xu Di Shan (1940) has also catalogued over one hundred historical references to spirit-writing.

²⁹⁵ As Zeitlin (1998:103 n. 6) explains, writings prompted by religious inspiration extend centuries earlier than those revealed through the planchette (see Ledderose 1984).

in the *Record of Investigations of the Divine* (*Jishen Lu* 稽神錄), written by Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (917-992).²⁹⁶ The origins of spirit-writing are generally thought to have begun with a ritual called “Inviting the Purple Lady” (*qing Zigu* 請紫姑), which was once practiced on the fifteenth night of the first lunar month (Chao 1942:11). In this form of divination, participants walked out to their latrines, placed offerings of wine and fruit in front of a paper image of the Purple Lady (*Zigu shen* 紫姑神) – also known as the Goddess of the Privy – and asked her questions about the coming year (Chao 1942:12).²⁹⁷

While this cult of the Purple Lady dates back as far as the fifth century, as Zeitlin explains, “Many modern scholars concur with Mei Dingzuo (梅鼎祚), the late Ming compiler of *Records of Talented Ghosts* (*Caigui ji* 才鬼記), that it was not until the tenth century that her cult became associated with spirit writing and people began to leave records of texts composed through planchette” (1998:103). The transformation from simple divination to complex textual construction occurred as some literati became involved in this type of divination and the Purple Lady began answering in not only affirmative or negative replies, but also writing and even painting (Chao 1942:13). The Purple Lady was soon just one of the many deities who would descend to write messages and, as Jordan and Overmyer explain, spirit-writing soon became “as flexible an instrument as human imagination and the Chinese cultural tradition are prepared to make it. Its revelations can range from paintings to books of poetry, from revelations to stir the age to prescriptions to cure the common cold” (1986:128).

²⁹⁶ For more on the history of spirit-writing see Kleeman (1994:8-13).

²⁹⁷ For more on the Purple Lady see Jordan and Overmyer (1986:38-39) and Xu (1941:10-11).

The literati were the primary participants in spirit-writing séances from the tenth to the twentieth centuries.²⁹⁸ Russell explains, “Rather than being widely practiced by men and women from all levels of the social strata as seems to be the case in present-day Taiwan, *fúji* was most prevalent among the literate elite” (1990:108). Similarly, the audience for these spirit-writing sessions and texts were comprised primarily of the literatus.²⁹⁹ Russell provides a glimpse into an early spirit-writing cult at Wanfu Monastery on Mount Huangbo in Fujian. The translated account of these spirit-writing practices by some high-ranking monks in late-traditional China (c. 1600-1700 ACE) reads:

In Great Tang (China) anytime men of letters have idle time they study spells and talismans from Daoist priests. Then they take a branch from the side of a peach tree facing the sun and make a *ji*. For the *ji* they use a rice winnow or a dust pan and take the peach branch and stick it into the edge of the winnow. Then they take a brush and stick it onto the peach branch so that they hold it up with their hands. Then they make invocations and burn talismans. After the burning is done they make ritual prayers towards the sky and knock their teeth six times. Then the immortal will descend. [Russell 1990:134]

Spirit-writing served, in some ways, as an extension of late imperial Chinese poetic practices in which the educated would come together and test each other’s poetic mettle. Morgan proposes of these poet-mediums, “Being in a state of trance did not deprive them of their knowledge of classical poetry and its rules... While not as polished as the works of great poets... authors attempt to imitate Tang and Song poetry and often paraphrase isolated lines from well known poets such as Li Bai, Bo Juyi, Su

²⁹⁸ Jordan and Overmyer explain, “The overall picture that emerges from the ethnographic accounts, to the extent that there is one, is an identification of *fu-chi* with the literate classes, for the most part, well into the twentieth century, even though in some places the technique seems merely to have been added to the repertoire of mediums, priests of sundry kinds, and no doubt various scapegraces who exploited it for money” (1986:54).

²⁹⁹ Russell explains, “The audience for this kind of spirit-writing was, naturally, very limited. Only those who could read and understand poetry and ornate prose, that is to say, members of the literate elite, might effectively take part in *fúji* séances. Among these men (and, rarely, women) poetry and classical prose were the most important means of communication and social intercourse. The ability to compose in these forms was, therefore, one of the prerequisites for membership in this social group” (1990:117).

Dongpo, and others” (1998:10). Zeitlin (1998:107) states that there are at least four major similarities between spirit-writing and poetic gatherings including: an emphasis on spontaneously composing verse on demand and adopting the voice of an(other), an emphasis on poetry recitation as a social event, poetic compositions which attempted to recreate the circumstances in which the poem took place, and the power which poetry and spirit-writing has to traverse the boundaries of life and death, past and present, reality and imagination.

As the popularity of spirit-writing grew, educated individuals formed permanent associations where they could record and distribute their writings. Chinese sectarian organizations,³⁰⁰ which date back to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), began producing their own vernacular scriptures, called “precious volumes” (*baozhuan* 寶卷),³⁰¹ during the sixteenth century. Jordan and Overmyer (1986:17-18) explain that these texts, which often alternate between prose and rhyming seven- or ten-character verse, feature pictures of deities or important characters, short verses blessing the emperor and realm, notes encouraging the text’s reprint, and a list of donors, served as a direct antecedent to longer spirit-written texts.³⁰²

Spirit-writing, originally used for personal divination, was eventually taken up by planchette clubs, formed by the literatus around successful mediums. Clart explains, “Their emphasis varied from a more literary type, where the chief interest of members was to exchange verses with the great poets of the past, to a more Daoist one, where members entered into a formal discipleship under the immortal who

³⁰⁰ Jordan and Overmyer explain that these sectarians were formed as “earlier associations of lay Buddhists incorporated Taoist beliefs and practices and evolved the basic characteristics of sectarian groups from then on: lay membership and leadership, voluntary adherence by individuals, hierarchical organization, distinctive beliefs and rituals, and possession of their own vernacular scriptures” (1986:16). For more on the history of these Chinese sectarian organizations see: Naquin (1976), Overmyer (1976).

³⁰¹ For an overview of these “precious volumes” (*bao zhuan*) see Overmyer (1999), especially his first chapter entitled “Antecedents in the History of Chinese Sacred Texts.”

³⁰² Jordan and Overmyer (1986:18) reveal that the literary labels “precious volumes” and “spirit-writings” were often interchangeable.

revealed his teachings through the planchette” (2005:105). Clart (2005:105) states that while these planchette clubs generally produced spirit-writings for the benefit of members, Chinese charitable societies (*shantang* 善堂) also felt it was their responsibility to educate the populace through the printing and distribution of morality books.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a new type of spirit-writing organization appeared which “combined the internal structure of a Daoist cult with the conservative social reformism of the charitable society” (Clart 2003b:11). These new spirit-writing cults adopted a well-known millenarian myth in which the Jade Emperor (*Yuhuang* 玉皇) became extremely angry when he learned that human morality had reached an unprecedented nadir. The Jade Emperor, bent on destroying all of mankind, was stopped by an assembly of deities, led by Guansheng Dijun (關聖帝君), who pled with him to reconsider and not “burn the jade with the stones” (Clart 2003b:11). The Jade Emperor agreed to postpone an apocalypse until after heaven’s deities had the chance to descend to the world through the planchette and attempt to curb human wickedness through their teachings (*jiaohua* 教化). Clart (2003b:11) explains that according to the myth, the gods used this opportunity to establish many spirit-writing cults in order to record and spread their divine teachings through morality books. Clart continues:

This myth gave expression to the serious disquiet among members of the literate local elite about the decline of the traditional order, and legitimized a planchette cult movement devoted to the moral reform of their age by making it their duty to assist the gods in changing the wicked ways of the world in the face of an impending apocalypse. To serve this purpose, they were not content to hold séances for their membership alone, but actively disseminated their revelations by means of public lectures to the illiterate masses. [2003b:11]

While spirit-writing authors during the eighteenth century merely reinforced a largely accepted moral system, planchette clubs of the nineteenth century struggled to

maintain control of a traditional value system whose “very validity was called into question” (Clart 2005:104). This task was accomplished through three new developments in *shanshu* literature: spirit-writing became the primary mode of production, revealing deities became diversified, and the use of narrative formats increased (Clart 2005:104).³⁰³

Taiwanese Spirit-Writing Cults

This combination of Daoist planchette club, charitable society, and millenarian mission present in Chinese spirit-writing associations spread to Taiwan in 1853 when the first spirit-writing cult was founded in Magong City 馬公, the capital of the Penghu 澎湖 (Pescadores) Islands located off the coast of Fujian province.³⁰⁴ Clart (2003b:6) reveals that in that year, a group of Magong elite sent one of their own prospective mediums to the city of Quanzhou (泉州) in Fujian to receive instruction in spirit-writing with a planchette organization called the “Society for Public Goodness” (Gongshan She 公善社). After this medium returned, the Magong literati formed a “Society for Universal Exhortation” (Puquan She 普勸社) and began conducting their own spirit-writing ceremonies. While the activities of the Society ceased during the French occupation of the Penghu Islands in 1885 during the Sino-French war, the organization was renamed the “Society for Complete Renewal” (Yixin She 一新社) two years later and began regular public lectures expounding the virtues found in texts like the *Tract on Action and Response* and the *Essay on Secret Virtue* (Yinzhi wen 陰鷺文) (Clart 2003b:6-7).³⁰⁵ As Clart (2003b:7) explains, in 1891 this Society

³⁰³ For a detailed history of nineteenth-century spirit-writing on the Chinese mainland see Clart (1996:12-57).

³⁰⁴ For more on the history of phoenix halls in Taiwan see Clart (1996:58-93), Song (1995), Wang (1996), Hiroaki (1972), Marui (1919), and Groot (1967, vol. 6).

³⁰⁵ As Katz (1999:80) explains, authors of early Taiwanese spirit-written books seemed more interested in increasing clan clout than creating a separate Taiwanese identity. Katz explains that while early Taiwanese *shanshu* did not create an identity based on differences with mainland China, this early spirit-written literature represents “an attempt by a segment of northern Taiwan’s elite to assert or reaffirm their leadership roles in local society following the traumatic events marking the decline of the Ch’ing and the occupation of the island by the Japanese in 1895” (1999:82).

established a separate sub-unit devoted entirely to the spirit-writing of new morality books. These new texts were collected from 1891 to 1903 and published as one of the earliest spirit-written morality books in Taiwan called the *Selected Novelties of Enlightenment* (Juewu xuanxin 覺悟選新).³⁰⁶

The next major developmental phase in Taiwanese spirit-writing cults occurred in 1937, when an influential northern Taiwanese planchette medium, Yang Mingji (楊明機) (1899-1983), compiled a book entitled *Liturgical Regulations of the Confucian School* (Rumen kefan 儒門科範) which constituted “the first formal attempt to define in an authoritative manner a set of liturgical procedures and a canon common to all phoenix halls” (Clart 2003b:13-14). Yang also created the name “Divine Teachings of the Confucian Tradition” (Ruzong shenjiao 儒宗神教) for the religious system shared by the Taiwanese spirit-writing organizations with which he was involved (Clart 2003b:13).³⁰⁷ Clart explains that while initially only a small group of northern and central Taiwanese phoenix halls accepted the *Liturgical Regulations of the Confucian School* as their guidebook:

In 1978 representatives of over five hundred phoenix halls decided to set up an association called ‘The Republic of China Assembly of the Divine Teachings of the Confucian School’ (Zhonghua Minguo Ruzong Shenjiao Hui 中華民國儒宗神教會), thus formally establishing Ruzong Shenjiao as a general description for the religious system represented by a large portion of Taiwanese phoenix halls. [2003b:20-21]

These spirit-writing halls still identify themselves as “Confucian religions” (Rujiao 儒教 or Kongjiao 孔教), “Confucian spirit religions” (Rushenjiao 儒神教), or

³⁰⁶ At almost the same time, local literati in Taiwan’s northeast Ilan County (宜蘭縣) produced what is most likely Taiwan’s earliest spirit-written morality book in 1890 (Clart 2003b:7).

³⁰⁷ Yang also addressed the primary concern associated with combining Confucian teachings and spirit-writing, that Confucius himself “never discussed strange phenomena, physical exploits, disorder, or spiritual beings.” Clart explains, “According to the spirit-writing Confucius, the passage should be read as ‘the Master never discussed strange powers and disorderly spirits,’ leaving open the possibility of his interest in other kinds of supernatural phenomena, such as ‘orthodox’ deities” (2003b:16).

“worshippers of the phoenix” (bailuan 拜鸞), “phoenix halls” (luantang 鸞堂), and “phoenix chapels” (luantan 鸞壇).³⁰⁸

New Style Phoenix Halls: The Hall of the Sages and Worthies

Of these five hundred phoenix halls, the most prolific and influential were located in the central Taiwanese city of Taizhong (台中).³⁰⁹ During the 1970s and 1980s, “new-style phoenix halls” (*xinshi luantang* 新式鸞堂) emerged as “specialized religious associations that developed professional structures for the production of morality books, with full-time mediums and often their own publishing organs” (Clart 1996:6).³¹⁰ These phoenix halls included the Hall of Rebirth (Chongsheng Tang 重生堂), the Precious Palace of Sacred Virtue (Shengde Baogong 聖德寶宮), the Temple of the Martial Sage, Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy (Wumiao Mingzheng Tang 武廟明正堂), and the focus of this chapter, the Hall of the Sages and Worthies (Shengxian Tang 聖賢堂). Clart reveals, “The Shengxian Tang, first founded in 1962, was the pioneer from which the other halls mentioned above split off at different times. In the liturgical realm, the Shengxian Tang had a major impact on the Ruzong Shenjiao by designing in 1979 a new ritual manual, the *Sacred Statutes of the Phoenix Halls* (*Luantang shengdian* 鸞堂聖典)” (2003b:21). This text, written in vernacular Chinese, outlines ten “hall regulations” (*Luantang tanggui* 鸞堂堂規) which were to be adopted by all of the other major spirit-writing organizations (see Appendix 4).

³⁰⁸ As Clart (1996:1, n. 1) explains, “phoenix hall” is not an entirely accurate translation of *luantang* (鸞堂). The *luan* is a mythical bird whose correct English translation should be simurgh, not phoenix. Yet for simplicity’s sake, and to match previous studies, I will also employ the term “phoenix.” For more on the terminology used to denote spirit-writing see Clart (1996:237-240).

³⁰⁹ See Appendix 3 for a map of Taiwan.

³¹⁰ Jordan and Overmyer, who provide a brief investigation of spirit-writing magazines (1986:76-79), explain of these publications, “Their perspective is ecumenical; they include news from different sects, revelations from a variety of deities, and discussions of texts and concepts from Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism” (1986:76-77).

Clart (1996:96-122) outlines the history of the founding of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies by its chairman Zheng Xuanxiang,*³¹¹ a prosperous stationary merchant in the central Taiwanese city of Taizhong. In 1962, Zheng* established a private shrine in his home which he called the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. In 1965, on one of his business trips, Zheng* stopped in front of a rural temple called the “Hall of Kindness and Virtue” (Huide Tang 惠德堂) located in the town of Caotun (草屯) in Nantou county.³¹² A spirit-writing session was transpiring and the descending deity, Guansheng Dijun (關聖帝君), revealed a poem addressed to Zheng,* despite the fact that he knew no one in the temple. This spirit-writing session deeply influenced Zheng,* whose home and Hall of the Sages and Worthies shrine, which had about thirty devotees, had recently been destroyed by fire. Zheng* later received messages from three deities in the Hall of Kindness and Virtue, the longest of which was from Guanyin who explained that the fire was designed to test his determination. Zheng* rebuilt his home and reestablished the Hall of the Sages and Worthies on the fourth floor. Inspired by the spirit-written messages he had received, Zheng* invited the Hall of Kindness and Virtue’s medium, Lin Huaiyi (林懷益), and his retinue of spirit-writers to the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. As Clart explains, “This request was approved, and thereafter the Huide Gong *fuluan* team came to Taizhong to conduct séances on every third, thirteenth, and twenty-third of the lunar month. This marks the beginning of Shengxian Tang’s operation as a spirit-writing cult” (1996:102).³¹³

Clart (1996:102) explains that in early 1970, after Zheng* agreed to become the principal sponsor and financial supporter of the Luanyou Magazine Society and

³¹¹ I am borrowing Clart’s (1996:101) assigned alias for continuity and privacy’s sake. All assigned aliases will be denoted with an asterisk.

³¹² Founded in 1947 by a physician named Wang Tianci (王添賜), this temple had been spirit-writing since 1961 after receiving donations from local merchants, factory owners, and farmers (Clart 1996:96-97).

³¹³ As Clart (1996:102, n. 17) explains, the messages that Zheng* received have been reprinted in the *Taizhong Shengxian Tang, Wuri Tiande Gong jianjie* (1986:1-2).

the fourth floor Hall of the Sages and Worthies became too small to accommodate its many new members, Zheng* rented a house on Fuyin Street (福音街) as a new location for the temple. In the latter part of 1970, as Clart (1996:103) explains, members of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies were ordered through the planchette to train its own mediums. The Hall of Kindness and Virtue's medium, Lin Huaiyi, took 49 days to train two apprentice mediums, called "Wise Stylus" (Zhibi 智筆) and "Benevolent Stylus" (Renbi 仁筆). Clart explains that these mediums began spirit-writing at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies "every third, sixth, ninth, thirteenth, sixteenth, nineteenth, twenty-third, twenty-sixth, and twenty-ninth days of the lunar month" (1996:103). Zhang Yunchang,* one of the central members of Caotun's Hall of Kindness and Virtue, decided to move with his son to Taizhong in 1970 after financial frictions between phoenix disciples at his old temple became unbearable. Zhang's* fourteen year-old son, Zhang Haoce,* was apprenticed as the Hall of the Sages and Worthies' third medium and given the name "Valiant Stylus" (Yongbi 勇筆).

Clart (1996:104-105) explains that Valiant Stylus, whose writings innovatively favored prose over poetry, became the primary medium at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies between 1971 to 1976 and his writings were published island-wide in the *Luanyou* magazine.³¹⁴ Clart reveals:

When Yongbi became the third medium of the Shengxian Tang in 1971, he continued his colleagues' emphasis on prose revelations, but developed this form further. He was intellectually very agile and not content to be a mere moralistic storyteller; while he continued the apparently highly popular karmic stories, he also started to write short essays on topics such as 'vast material force,' ... 'harmfulness of gambling,' 'the nine heavens' etc. [1996:106]

³¹⁴ For translated examples of earlier spirit-writing sessions from the Hall of the Sages and Worthies in a collection of spirit-written texts, entitled *Mirror of the Way* (道鑑) published in 1979, see Thompson (1982:100-107, 111-128).

Clart continues, “He also experimented with soul-traveling...His short *Record of Birthday Congratulations in the Palace of Jade Vacuity* (Yuxu gong baishou ji 玉虛宮拜壽記) is an early forerunner of a genre of ‘spirit travelogues’” (1996:106-107).³¹⁵

Spirit Travelogues: Record of a Journey to the Underworld and Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven

As The Hall of the Sages and Worthies became increasingly estranged from its parent temple, the Hall of Kindness and Virtue, its spirit-writing mediums were correspondingly freer to attempt new textual innovations. One of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies original mediums, Benevolent Stylus, was likely the first Taiwanese medium to write in the vernacular language, travel by spirit to the afterlife, and include narrative accounts between inhabitants of otherworldly realms like hell (Clart 1996:323-324). This use of the vernacular, creative narrative accounts, unifying plot structure, and travel to otherworldly realms are all features of a genre of morality books called “spirit-travelogues.” Spirit-travelogues share many commonalities with other morality books including: the literary and entertainment aspects of “precious volumes,”³¹⁶ the moral exhortations of “imperial edicts,”³¹⁷ and the carefully

³¹⁵ Clart explains, “Yongbi’s Guan Di centered work in the Shengxian Tang culminated in 1975 in the planchette writing of the *True Description of the Heavenly Realms* (Tianjie chuan hen 天界傳真), a systematic description of the heavenly bureaucracy. This served as a counterpart to an earlier book on the structure of purgatory, published by the Shengxian Tang in 1975, *The Ten Palaces Purgatory* (Shidian diyu 十殿地獄). Similar to the *Shidian diyu* – and different from later books such as the *Record of Travels to the Heavenly Halls* (Tiantang youji 天堂遊記) – the *Tianjie chuanzhen* is not a shamanic travelogue, but a collection of descriptions given by deities who descended onto the altar of the Shengxian Tang” (1996:119). Clart (1996:120-121) explains that three months after the conclusion of the *True Description* in December of 1975, Yongbi’s father, Zhang Yunchang,* and Zheng* parted ways due to disagreements concerning the finances of the Phoenix Friend Publishing Society. Zhang* and his followers split from the Hall of the Sages and Worthies and founded their own temple, the Wumiao Mingzheng Tang, nearby.

³¹⁶ Jordan and Overmyer explain that there are four subtypes of “precious volumes,” the last of which featured a more literary character often focused on the “struggles and victories of moral persons who in the end attain salvation” (1986:18). Of this type of precious volume Jordan and Overmyer explain, “They represent a stage when this genre was losing contact with sectarian history and becoming a form of general moral literature concerned as well with entertainment. Many of these books were produced by local publishers as commercial ventures” (1986:18).

calculated scales of karmic retribution located in the ledgers of merits and demerit,³¹⁸ as well as the same use of vernacular in later Chinese novels³¹⁹ and focus on the fantastic and strange found in *zhiguai* literature.³²⁰ Two genres of morality book literature, *xingshu* (行述), life-stories of individuals who were accorded divine status after their death, and *anzheng* (案證), illustrations of sinners and their punishments after death, were already common throughout Taiwan. Clart explains that Hall of the Sages and Worthies mediums' innovation "lies largely in the introduction of lively colloquial dialogue into these accounts that previously had mostly been written in the literary language" (1996:107).

While new to Taiwan, similar spirit-written journeys to heaven and hell featuring both dialogic structure and lively, colloquial language were present in China beginning in the 1920s and 1930s (Clart 1996:107). Two examples of early spirit-travelogues include the *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld* (Dongming baoji 洞冥寶記) and the *Record of the Immortality Peach Banquet* (Pantaoyan ji 蟠桃宴記). These texts were written during 1921-22 and 1933

³¹⁷ Eberhard (1967:25-26) explains that the most famous type of morality book was the "imperial edict," issued by many emperors to exhort their subjects to do good and follow the law. Eberhard also explains, "Between 1400 and 1600, leading personalities issued books of moralistic character with the openly declared aim of improving the moral character of the lower classes" (1967:26).

³¹⁸ Brokaw explains, "The ledgers of merit and demerit are a category of morality book...a genre of literature that as a whole became very popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Morality books can be defined simply as texts that teach people to do good and avoid evil. The ledgers, like all morality books, are founded on the belief in supernatural retribution – that is, the faith that heaven and the gods will reward men who do good and punish those who do evil" (1991:3).

³¹⁹ Lin discusses *The Travels of Laocan* (Laocan youji 老殘遊記), written by Liu E (劉鶚) (1857-1909) during the final years of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), which he characterizes as the "last classic Chinese novel" (2001:564). This novel shares many similarities with spirit-travelogues like an emphasis on accounting for change (Lin 2001:550), the use of vernacular Chinese (Lin 2001:551), a mode of narration which accounts for multiple perspectives (Lin 2001:555), and journeys to the afterlife which serve as allegory and extensions of individual desires and collective concerns (Lin 2001:562).

³²⁰ As DeWoskin explains of the term *zhiguai*, "Since the Ming dynasty it has been used to designate a genre of tales and notices that focus on fantastic men, fantastic places, and fantastic events" (1977:22). Campamy explains that *zhiguai* literature, or "accounts of the strange," is a genre uniquely situated to revealing conceptions of the afterlife as it was based – at least in part – on popular oral tales, many authors were allied with neither the Buddhist sangha nor Daoist lineages, and because these narratives both described and shaped notions of the afterlife (1990:92-93).

respectively, by a group of three spirit-writing cults in Yunnan province's Eryuan County (洱源縣). Clart explains, "The *Dongming baoji* is a lively record of a spirit-journey to the underworld and to the Heavens whose conditions are described minutely and whose denizens are interviewed by the traveling mediums. It apparently was a huge success and spawned a large number of imitations" (1996:322). After the production and distribution of these texts, spirit-written morality texts in China became longer – often book length – and displayed a conscious concern for narrative coherence and vernacular usage (Clart 1996:322).

Although the Hall of the Sages and Worthies' "Benevolent Stylus" may have been the first Taiwanese spirit-writing medium to dabble with the spirit-travelogue genre, one of his successors, a Way of Unity³²¹ trained planchette medium named Yang Zanru (楊贊儒), was the first to enjoy great success implementing these innovations.³²² In 1976, when Valiant Stylus left the Hall of the Sages and Worthies to complete his compulsory military service, Yang took his place and began his tenure as lead medium. On August 15th, 1976, Yang stood at the front of a congregation – women on the right and men lined on the left. Clutching the Y-shaped divination stick, Yang's hand came down with a thud into a tray of sand and began tracing characters that were quickly interpreted, copied by his scribes, and subsequently read aloud to worshippers in attendance.³²³ Sectarian parishioners in the Hall of the Sages and

³²¹ The Way of Unity Sect (Yiguan Dao—貫道) incorporates elements of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam. The world headquarters are located in El Monte, California and the organization currently boasts that it has more than two million members. For similarities and differences between Taiwanese phoenix halls and the Way of Unity see Clart (1996:352-357).

³²² Shahar explains, "The principal wielder of the fuji was a Mr. Yang, whose first name, Zanru (literally 'praising Confucianism'), certainly befits the traditional orientation of his compositions. At least forty other people assisted Mr. Yang in the séances that led to the two works' publication, and their names are listed in both. Indeed, most spirit-written morality books are not the product of one person's labor, but are produced by small groups of believers who channel their religious sentiments into the publication of these works" (1998:191).

³²³ The Hall of the Sages and Worthies spirit-writing sessions which I witnessed from 2004-2006 were quite similar to those recorded in the *Mingzheng Tang* by Clart (1996:205-214). The Hall's chairman or vice-chairman calls over the P.A. system for all phoenix disciples to gather. These congregants, wearing

Worthies soon realized that this session's content differed from previous nights as the Jade Thearch himself descended with a special message.

This Taiwanese temple was ceremoniously given the divine decree to compile a book entitled *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, ostensibly in hopes that gruesome description of the tortures of hell would dissuade people from committing sin. This strenuous process took two years and 62 recorded journeys to complete and was first published as a series of episodes which appeared as a column in the bimonthly *Periodical of the Sages and Worthies* (Shengxian Zazhi 聖賢雜識) from November 1976 (issue No. 11) to September 1978 (issue No. 55) (Pas 1989:54). *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* is, by most accounts, still the most popular spirit-travelogue and representation of hell in Taiwan today (Clart 1996:325; Ling 2005:206; Pas 1989:55) with three million copies printed in the first five years (Song 1995:7-8) and translations in Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and English (Pas 1989:43). Yang also authored a companion to this text called *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, published in 1981, which features his 36 journeys to heaven.³²⁴

These seminal texts and their author ignited the production of an entire corpus of similar spirit-travelogues at temples throughout Taiwan. Zheng Zhiming (1988:417-419) compiled a chart of the 19 most prevalent Taiwanese spirit-travelogues (see Appendix 5).³²⁵ From this list, he explains, one can clearly see that the spirit-

their "ceremonial clothes" (*lifu* 禮服) which consist of light-blue gowns and black cloth shoes enter the temple with the men to the stage-left of the altar, and the women to the stage-right. After the ritual "three kneelings and nine kowtows" (*sangui jiukou* 三跪九叩) and 46 hits on the bronze bell and 92 on the "wooden fish" (*myu* 木魚) incense is offered and the spirit-writing participants enter the "inner sanctuary" (*neidian* 內殿). To the medium's right stand the "readers" (*changluansheng* 唱鸞生) and to his left stand the "scribes" (*bilusheng* 筆錄生), who stand at a desk and record the characters as they are written.

³²⁴ Just like Bauer's (1967:196) pronouncement that paradise pales when compared to representations of hell, Jordan and Overmyer propose of this text, "It was followed in 1982 by *Journey Through Heaven*...Like *Paradise Regained* or *Paradiso*, it is less interesting than the account of hell preceding it" (1986:81, n. 34).

³²⁵ Zheng has written an entire chapter on this subject entitled "Revealing New Religious Trends in Phoenix Book's Spirit-travelogues" (1988:413-450).

travelogue genre became wildly popular in the decade following the publication of *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and that the majority of these texts were written in the central Taiwanese city of Taizhong. Zheng states, “This is the newest developmental trend among Taiwan’s phoenix halls and phoenix books” (1988:419).³²⁶ Even now, temples like the Hall of Complete Truth under the Jurisdiction of Southern Heaven (Nantian Zhixia Quanzhentang 南天直轄全真堂), located on the northwestern coast of Taiwan in the city of Xijiu (新竹), have produced spirit-written texts like 2004’s *Record of a Journey to Buddha’s Western Paradise* (Xitian fogue youji 西天佛國游記) and 2005’s *Record of a Journey to the Netherworld* (Ming youji 冥游記).³²⁷

I have decided to focus my analysis on the two spirit-travelogues which I believe display the most revealing and fascinating formulations of both heaven and hell, Yang’s *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*. My analysis, which is predominately textual, will also be supplemented by the interviews, surveys, discussions, observations, and photographs³²⁸ I collected while conducting preliminary doctoral research, funded by a Cornell University Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies Travel Grant and Hu Shih Memorial Award during June to August of 2005 and 2006, and ethnographic fieldwork, conducted from October 2006 through April 2007 via an Aisiang Cultural Foundation Su Tian-shui Memorial Fellowship and a Fulbright-Hays DDRA. Scholars have primarily read *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* as a “thermometer” by

³²⁶ Thirty years after its publication, Clart’s statement that *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* “played a crucial role in giving final legitimization to the use of the vernacular language for expressing the gods’ teachings in coherent, book-length format. It opened the floodgates for free experimentation with different kinds of literary formats, freeing the spirit-written literature from its traditional formal constraints” (1996:325) still holds true.

³²⁷ For a translation of a chapter from this spirit-travelogue see Appendix 6.

³²⁸ This research material was collected utilizing the standards and under the approval of the Institutional Review Board for Human Participants at Cornell University.

which to gauge the religious climate and societal sentiment of Taiwanese sectarians (Pas 1989:55; Song 1982). While these collective concerns are one important aspect of both *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, I will also be investigating the continuities and changes these texts represent in an effort to round out formulations of Chinese popular religion and I will venture into the unexplored territory of the individual desires these morality books contain.

Continuities and Changes

Some scholars believe that morality books like *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* contain no significant changes from their historical precedents. Charles Orzech (1994:114), for instance, proclaims shock not at what he terms the “minor modernizing” found in these contemporary formulations of the underworld, but in their many continuities with earlier texts. Others, such as Pas, believe that these texts integrate some major changes. He states, in reference to *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, “While remaining very traditional, it is yet very progressive in that it makes a definitive effort to adjust moral concepts and religious convictions to the changing situation of the modern world” (Pas 1989:55). Both of these divergent analyses are correct as the author of *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* incorporates both tradition and innovation in the creation of these texts.

Textual continuities include historical parallels, structural similarities, and an intended purpose which corresponds with earlier accounts of the afterlife. Yang Zanru consciously patterned his spirit travelogues after historical precedents and candidly references these earlier texts in both *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*.³²⁹ During Yang’s 23rd journey to hell, one

³²⁹ This process of textual citation seems akin to the self-conscious complexities discussed earlier. As Jordan and Overmyer explain, “There is no blurring of sources, and no attempt to elevate one contributing font above another, but a pride in their separateness, and a strong sense of using them as

of the underworld's officers cites *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* (Yang 1978:122) and on their 42nd journey to hell, Yang's guide reveals that *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* is actually patterned after the *Precious Records* (Yang 1978:232). Similarly, at the beginning of their 12th journey to heaven Yang's guide quotes *The Most High's Tract on Action and Response* (Yang 1981:86) and during their 16th journey compares their journey with the classic tale of Journey to the West. He explains, "The record of the monk Xuan Zang's journey west explains that he went through many trails and difficulties before reaching his goal. Today, we are writing *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* in order to instruct the world and this undertaking is much like Xuan Zang's journey to retrieve Buddhist sutras" (Yang 1981:115).

Another similarity between these contemporary and historical texts is that all but one of Yang's 98 journeys to heaven and hell are guided by the Living Buddha Jigong (Jigong Huofo 濟公活佛), a late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Buddhist monk who lived near the city of Hangzhou (杭州), which at that time was the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). Meir Shahar, who has written an entire book about Jigong, explains that the "earliest modern indication of Jigong's role in spirit-writing is the poem quoted above that Jigong dictated in a Boxer spirit-writing séance, which took place in Beijing in 1900" (1998:189). Since 1900, Jigong has served as one of the principle deities called on during spirit-writing sessions for the Way of Unity Sect,³³⁰ and during the 1970s and 1980s at least eighteen new morality

raw materials to create something distinctive, new, and greater than the sum of its parts. At the same time that sectarians claim to be creating something new, they also claim that it is primordial, a restoration of the 'true' unity underlying the component traditions" (1986:10).

³³⁰ This is the same Sect to which Yang Zanru once belonged and Shahar explains that during the 1930s and 1940s full-length books were attributed to Jigong (1998:189).

books composed through spirit-writing were attributed wholly, or in part, to Jigong (Shahar 1998:190).

Structural similarities, both in terms of textual construction and geographical composition, abound between *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, and their historical archetypes. Both of Yang's contemporary spirit-travelogues are written with an emphasis on narrative continuity, comprised of chapters written in vernacular Chinese, and prefaced by poems composed in classical Chinese. Narrative continuity, dialogic structure, and colloquial Chinese – as previously mentioned – are all hallmarks of earlier spirit-travelogues like *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld*. Another textual continuity is the use of classical Chinese prose at the beginning of each chapter. The oldest extant sectarian scripture, *The Precious Volume Expounded by the Buddha, on the Results of [The Teaching of] the Imperial Ultimate Period*, published in 1430, similarly alternates between prose and verse.³³¹ The parallel lines of heptasyllabic verse which start each chapter of *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* are found in this early Chinese sectarian scripture, where they also serve as introduction (Overmyer and Li 1992:20).³³²

The basic structure of hell in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* has remained much the same as its historical precedents like the *Precious Records* and the *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld* (see Appendix 7). There are still ten courts of hell, subdivided into subsections constructed to accommodate the

³³¹ Thomas Li and Overmyer (1992:18-20) recently located and catalogued this scripture, which was published some eighty years earlier than they were thought to exist.

³³² As Pas explains, "Each episode starts with a four line stanza of seven characters per line. Many morality texts are composed in such a kind of poetry. But the main body of the text is in vernacular prose and the literary genre is dialogue" (1989:56).

type of sin punished, and each court is ruled by the same judges in all books.³³³ Other underworldly cast members have also remained the same. Yang encounters the ox-head and horse-faced demons, which are mentioned as early as the *Mahāvastu*, on a trip to the second court of hell (Yang 1978:49) and during his 26th journey to the netherworld Yang observes the “iron dogs of hell,” (Yang 1978:141) found in early texts like the *Mahāvastu* and *Eunuch Sanbao to the Western Ocean*. Many of the underworld’s historical landmarks are also present in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*. While touring the first court of hell, Yang visits the “Terrace of the Karmic Mirror” (*niejing tai* 孽鏡臺), also located in the *Precious Records*. Yang and his guide Jigong pass over the “Naihe Bridge” during their 13th journey to hell (Yang 1978:67), visit the “Platform for Viewing One’s Home” on their 30th journey (Yang 1978:162), and tour a city in the underworld called “Hell’s Region of Common Citizens” (*Difu pingmin qu* 地府平民區) for the deceased whose merits and demerits balanced out (Yang 1978:324), all of which are also located in *Eunuch Sanbao to the Western Ocean*.³³⁴

The basic structure of paradise in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* also shares many points of continuity with its historical precedents. On his sixth journey to heaven, Yang provides this description of Ling Bao Tian Zun’s palace:

In front of us lies a large, four-tiered building in the shape of a cloud. Golden light is shooting out in all directions and this Jade Palace has been constructed out of both jade and gold; decorated with pearls and agate. This is not an ordinary building constructed of wood and mud. I am enchanted by this

³³³ Just like in historical accounts of hell (Goodrich 1981:74; Maspero 1981:176), Yang comments that, “Human beings say that the Fifth Court’s Senluo Wang is like his highness Bao Gong, who stands for justice and fair play” (Yang 1978:170).

³³⁴ Hell is also certainly still portrayed as a bureaucracy in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* where, in the second journey, Yang and Jigong visit the World of Yin and Yang’s “Registration Office” (*Jiaobu ting* 交簿廳) (Yang 1978:13). The registrar of this office explains, “When a human being dies his earthly record of actions and deeds is transferred to the Underworld Registration Office for immediate inspection” (Yang 1978:15). This is reminiscent of both the structure of hell found within the *Precious Records* and congruent with the teachings of morality books like the *Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*.

beautiful scene and I am at a loss to describe its solemnity and luxury. Heavenly flowers surround us and a dharma rain is falling on the green pines and emerald cypress. There is nothing dirty or troubling anywhere. White cranes perch in fernianas and goldfish swim in heavenly ponds. These charming sights are so enchanting that some may forget to return home. [Yang 1981:34]

This is clearly reminiscent of descriptions of the Queen Mother of the West's jade palace and the exotic and pure white animals found in descriptions of the immortal islands of Penglai. Yang also visits the River of Three Clarities on his seventh journey to heaven, which flows from Mount Kunlun (Yang 1981:43), visits the "Eternal Peach Cave at the Mountain of the Nine Immortals," patterned after the Daoist grotto paradises, on his 25th journey to heaven (Yang 1981:167), and Amitabha's Western Paradise on his 29th journey (Yang 1981:187-188).³³⁵

The cast present in Yang's *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* can also be found in historical accounts of paradise. One of the first major figures that Yang encounters is Monkey, from *Journey to the West*, who has been charged with guarding Southern Heaven's gate (Yang 1981:10). Historical Buddhist figures are also present as Yang meets with Sakyamuni at the Western Heaven's Precious Palace of Heroes during his 27th journey, Guanyin at the Southern Sea's Mount Pu To during his 28th journey, and Amitabha in the Land of Western Paradise on his 29th journey. The Eight Immortals, Laozi, Confucius, Queen Mother of the West, and Jade Emperor are also present throughout *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and come together to honor Yang in the final chapter's banquet.³³⁶

³³⁵ Upon entering the Western Paradise on his 29th journey to heaven yang exclaims, "Oh! Arriving at this location there are gold, silver, and precious stones spread everywhere. They are neatly arranged on fences, within the forest, and caught within nets. Each is extraordinary and sparkling. This is something that cannot be seen in the mortal realm!" Jigong replies, "The Land of Western Paradise is where Amitabha Buddha resides. This is the 'Land of Paradise, Seven Fences of Gems, Seven Nets of Gems, and Seven Avenues of Gem Trees, surrounded by treasure on all sides'" (Yang 1981:187-188).

³³⁶ A similar banquet occurs in chapter 98 of *Journey to the West* when Sanzang's journey to the Western Paradise is finally complete.

Parallel themes also tie historical and contemporary representations of the afterlife. On his seventh journey to hell, Yang (1978:33-36) visits the first court's location for punishing Daoists and Buddhists who were paid to recite prayers but have done so sloppily. A similar scene can be found in the *Precious Records*, which also records the punishment of both Daoists and Buddhists in the first court of hell (Clarke 1893:254), and in the *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld*, which features these sinners located in "low, dark houses with tiny lamps, in which the sinners recite books which they can hardly read in the darkness, and in which they mend books" (Eberhard 1967:32). Another of these parallel themes is the intended purpose which both historical and contemporary texts share.

While one of the primary purposes shared by both historical and contemporary spirit-travelogues is the attempt to curb a particular time period's "immoralities" through vivid accounts of horrific tortures and beatific paradises, another objective is to awaken those who are "fated" to follow the Way.³³⁷ There are direct parallels between discussions of those thought to possess "proper karmic affinity" (*youyuan ren* 有緣人) in the earliest sectarian scripture, *The Precious Volume Expounded by the Buddha* (Overmyer and Li 1992:21), and *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. The search for those fated to return to heaven is motivated in historical and contemporary texts by the Jade Emperor's wrath at moral corruption and desire to see mortals repent, as in the *Precious Records* (Clarke 1893:242), or by the Eternal Mother's vow to "save all original beings," in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (Yang 1981:72).³³⁸

³³⁷ Lang and Ragvald (1998:315) similarly write of a late nineteenth and early twentieth century spirit-writer named Liang Renan (Leung Yan Ngam) who started a spirit-writing organization in Guangzhou, China in 1897 and later moved it to Hong Kong in 1915. This spirit-writer published two major compilations titled *Awake from Illusory Dreams* and *Important Words to Awaken the World*. Both titles seem congruous with Yang's stated mission.

³³⁸ In popular Chinese religious mythology, the Golden Mother is said to be waiting for the return of all of her children. Yang, writing as the Golden Mother in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*,

Some of what appears to be changes in contemporary spirit-travelogues are actually just continuities with earlier accounts of heaven and hell. These changes, what Orzech (1994:114) termed the “minor modernizing” of conceptions of the afterlife, have occurred since at least the seventeenth century (Eberhard 1967:21-22). For instance, there is a memorable scene in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* which features a dimly lit hell packed with males and females of every nationality. Yang asks the underworld officer to describe this location and he replies:

When the dance hostesses and club patrons of earth die, their souls are sent here to allow them to continue enjoying the thrills and pleasures of dancing. But here this dancing is not the same as in the luxurious clubs on earth. The floor of this dance hall is made of red hot iron so that when it is stepped on, the sinful souls jump up and cry aloud because of the hot floor. When they were alive, these people enjoyed themselves while dancing but here, when they dance on the hot floor, the soles of their feet become swollen with blisters.
[Yang 1978:70]

While this scene sounds like an original and creative change, it can be traced directly to the 1921-22 *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld*'s account of the fifth court. The author of this early text explains that five new sub-hells have been created to address the influx of foreigners into China. As Eberhard reveals, “One of the sub-hells is like a theater, but the performance consists of administering punishments on the stage. Another section is like a dance hall, but people dance on red-hot iron boards” (1967:38). While these modernizations may be continuities, not changes, I am certainly not arguing that these updates are meaningless or should be

plays on this popular theme revealing, “All of my children have now become wanderers. The immortal clothes that they once wore have already disappeared and have now been exchanged for common clothes. As they departed the mountain on which they were created their loving mother stitched clothes and bitterly bid them farewell. I was worried that after they descended to the mortal world that they would forget about the pure heavenly realm and perish after slowly forgetting how to return to heaven. Yet I hope that they will all be able to grasp onto the golden thread which your Mother dangles from heaven and climb aboard the vessel of mercy to return to my presence. Thus you can repay your Mother's kindness. Otherwise, you will become unfilial children. Do you understand?” (Yang 1981:134). For more on similar myths concerning the Golden Mother, which have been present since early spirit-written texts like *The Golden Basin of the Jade Dew* (Yulu jinpan 玉露金盤), which was first published in 1880, see Jordan and Overmyer (1986:17).

ignored. To the contrary, the fact that an author decides to include these modernizations, or leave them out (see Eberhard 1967:22), can be very revealing.

Aside from these minor modernizations, *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* do contain some significant changes from earlier spirit-travelogues. These include doctrinal innovations, individual additions (including the re-engineering of history), and changes in the amount of detail. Yang's most notable doctrinal innovations include an emphasis on salvation and increased access to heaven, the inclusion of both rehabilitation and punishment, and modern moderations of some outdated afterlife conceptions.

As previously mentioned in my chapter on the history of Chinese conceptions of paradise, salvation was commonly depicted as available only to a minority of extremely worthy citizens.³³⁹ The exclusivity of paradise is mentioned in historical texts like the *Records of Miraculous Retribution* (Mingbao ji 冥報記), which maintains that “Not one man in ten thousand attains the path of heaven” (Gjertson 1989:200). During Yang's third journey to hell, his guide Jigong similarly reveals that the road to hell is very crowded because “mortals on earth do more evil deeds than good” (Yang 1978:18). Heaven's exclusive nature is thought to have altered after the publishing and distribution of *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*. Jigong explains at the beginning of their first journey to heaven, “Mortals have also changed their evil ways to good. Thus the amount of evil actions on earth has diminished and souls do not want to go to hell. They flood heaven's gate, lingering and hoping to get one glance inside” (Yang 1981:7). Yang is also told that many righteous people arrive at

³³⁹ As Cohen explains, “For the majority of the population...it would appear that this idea of salvation, albeit incorporated into rituals and beliefs concerning the afterlife, was in fact given little room for expression” (1988:180).

the afterlife and are allowed to proceed directly to heaven, without the previously ubiquitous stop in hell to determine if any sins needed punishing (Yang 1981:18).

In addition to a more accessible heaven, Yang's spirit-travelogues include doctrinal innovations like the inclusion of rehabilitation and emphasis on moderation. These moderations include a more modern interpretation of underworld features like the "Bloody Pond" (Xuewu chi 血污池), commonly thought to be occupied by women who died whilst in childbirth (Seaman 1981). While touring the tenth court of hell, Jigong explains to Yang, "On earth, people say that women who die while giving birth are sent to the 'Bloody Pond' to suffer. This is not true. Giving birth to babies is only natural and those who die while giving birth are just unlucky. What logic would that be that these unlucky souls should be sent to this 'Bloody Pond' to suffer?" (Yang 1978:335). Another important change in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* is the emphasis on both punishment and rehabilitation. In the fourth journey, Jigong and Yang visit a large pavilion labeled with the words, "Every religion stems from the same model" (*wanjiao guizong* 萬教歸宗). Jigong explains, "At the present time on earth there are many religious faiths, yet the followers of one faith are always attacking the religious beliefs of another faith... The words of these people are very evil, so when they die their souls are brought here to undergo further instruction in the correct path" (Yang 1978:20). While in historical accounts of hell the followers of heretical religions would be immediately sent to endure horrific punishment, as Pas explains, "The 'author's' ingenuity has come up with an excellent *upaya*: rather than assigning the intolerant religious leaders to torture in hell, they are given a chance for mind reform outside the territory of the hells proper" (1989:60). During their tenth journey, Yang is again reminded that in every court there is a special pulpit from which Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva can lecture souls on morality, piety, and ascetic practice (Yang 1978:51, 54).

Yang's personal background as a Way of Unity medium can be clearly seen in this new emphasis on rehabilitation and his other individual additions to formulations of the afterlife. Yang listens in on one of these rehabilitation lectures as one of the masters explains that while there are five major religious traditions today, Daoism, Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, and Buddhism, they all came from the same source and it is people's misunderstanding and competitive nature which has caused the teachings to split (Yang 1978:21).³⁴⁰ This Way of Unity-inspired rhetoric occurs throughout both texts, like during Yang's 20th journey to heaven, when the Golden Mother proposes, "The mortals of this universe are as infants. Each religion attacks the other, which causes their collapse, until none can be saved. Perhaps the teachings within each religion are different, but their final goal is the same!" (Yang 1981:144). Yet Yang's individual embellishments go beyond occasional divine endorsements of Way of Unity teachings. Yang also occasionally re-engineers history by speaking as prominent and long-dead figures. On Yang's 26th journey to heaven he meets Confucius who comments:

It is fortunate for Confucianism that Mr. Yang has established a phoenix hall and "apricot alter"³⁴¹ and grasps the sacred pen to author morality books and awaken the world. My spirit in heaven truly feels reassured. Although Confucians do not carry on conversations about "extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, or spiritual beings," spiritual beings are virtuous, the universe contains much, and some experience harm and are not stopped. Thus, I am not against talking about such things. [Yang 1981:170]

Yang's pronouncement, here speaking as Confucius, contains both egocentric praise for himself and modulates one of Confucianism's long-standing tenets, that the supernatural cannot be known and should not be discussed.

³⁴⁰ Yang's personal background is also evident in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* where, compared with earlier texts like *The Precious Volume Expounded by the Buddha*, which features a Daoist and Confucian cast, Yang has at least mentioned major figures from the five major religious traditions.

³⁴¹ This "apricot alter" was where Confucius taught his students.

The final major change between Yang's spirit-travelogues and their historical precedents is found in the amount of detail included. For the most part, Yang's journeys to heaven and hell are much more comprehensive than their historical counterparts. For instance, while visiting hell's tenth court Yang not only includes a reference to Mother Meng's "tea of oblivion," but also explains that the method in which it is dispensed has changed. The tenth court's King Zhuanlun reveals, "There are some cunning sinful souls who come here and refuse to enter the pavilion because they know what happens when they drink this liquid. But under the ground there is an iron hook contraption that grips onto their feet and prevents them from moving. At the same time, a female attendant forces these cunning souls to drink" (Yang 1978:314).³⁴² Yang also includes what could be some of the first, and certainly most detailed, interviews of average residents of heaven.³⁴³ Yang, who begins these interviews on his eighth journey to heaven, asks a Golden Immortal how he attained residency in paradise and is told:

³⁴² King Zhuan Lun also reveals of the tea of oblivion, "After having drunk this liquid so many times prior to rebirth the effects are less noticeable thereby making contemporary children seem smarter than children of long ago. But this kind of intelligence is not truly intelligence. This is not good because it makes the present generation bold and fearless, daring to controvert the laws of the nation. Why should we be proud of this?" (Yang 1978:314).

³⁴³ These detailed interviews also occur between Yang and the animal residents of heaven. During Yang's 19th trip to heaven the Golden Mother commands a lotus flower and goldfish to reveal their personal stories. The goldfish explains, "I am friends with the lotus flower and together we live within this pond. I am very active and all day I swim about. My joy is boundless. My lotus sister is shy and does not dare to follow me as I swim about as she is afraid of going too deep. Yet my good circumstances are often fleeting as my owner catches me with a net and drags me to the surface. I am used by some people as bait and children see me and think that I am cute. Children surround and abuse me and if I am liked by a customer my owner will sell me and I am taken from a large pond and placed inside a tiny fishbowl. From this time on I live within this small universe. I accept my fate as my life passes by. However, I have actually become a supervisory god over humanity. Every action and movement is performed within my sight. I am used to this type of life and do not blame anyone for my situation. When people are troubled they stay near me and gaze at me with compassionate eyes while their hearts think, 'Although goldfish live in a tiny fishbowl they have no worries and can swim about freely. They do not have to worry about food or clothing. They just need clear water and are clothed in beautiful scales. They can stay immersed in water without rotting and are very bright. Their lives are better than those of people on earth who live in large buildings and whose hearts and minds are troubled'" (Yang 1981:139-140). On his 22nd journey to heaven Yang also talks with a large prawn (Yang 1981:155).

Good deeds! I attained the Way over one hundred years ago. I was born in Sichuan and when I was young both my parents passed away at the same time. Therefore, I traveled everywhere begging for my food yet I did not covet the possessions of others. My stomach was never full but I quenched my thirst for knowledge. One day while resting in a Daoist temple, a sacred and virtuous master took me as his disciple and imparted to me his Daoist techniques. After undergoing more than ten years of disciplined cultivation and enduring trials from demons without retreating I have arrived at the position in which you find me today. [Yang 1981:56]

Lord Dong Hua, during Yang's 14th journey to heaven, reveals that this increased detail is not accidental as, "From ancient time to the present there have been stories of heaven and hell. Yet these tales were all void of content and vague, with not one that could accurately describe these locations... This caused many people that wished to follow the Way to lose hope. Thus mercy was extended from above and heaven is now being shown to the world" (Yang 1981:101). While both *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* generally contain an increased level of detail, they do not reveal the specific locations or names of those punished in hell like historical texts such as the *Precious Records*.³⁴⁴

Collective Concerns

Record of a Journey to the Underworld and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* reflect congregants' collective concerns towards phenomena such as social change while outlining an afterlife which allows them to define these societal ills. These spirit-travelogues also attempt to provide both textual and active solutions to these collective concerns. The current membership of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies is slightly more identifiable than the sectarians studied by Jordan and Overmyer, who proposed that "trying to identify who the *pai-luan* sectarians are, in contrast to the rest of the population of Taiwan, is somewhat like trying to determine how American Presbyterians are different from the rest of the American population"

³⁴⁴ Yang is told that the reason sinful souls on his journey do not reveal their actual names or addresses is that they would be too ashamed to speak (Yang 1978:269).

(1986:6). While this was the case when Jordan conducted ethnographic research in the 1960s and 1970s, the groups which I observed were much more homogeneous.

The Hall of the Sages and Worthies currently has no regularly attending members under the age of around 40, except for the primary spirit-writer herself.³⁴⁵ All of the principal members are – at the very least – middle-class and college-educated.³⁴⁶ The basic attitude displayed by most of these members can be summed up in the traditionalist quote, “People’s hearts are not what they once were” (*renxin bugu* 人心不古), which was often recounted during personal interviews and appears throughout *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. This popular saying can also be found in sectarian texts like the *Precious Admonitions for the Instruction of Women*, written in western Yunnan province in 1921, which reveals in its preface, “The hearts of humans are not as of old. The common people everywhere turn against the Way and ruin virtue” (Clart 2003a:91).³⁴⁷ I will begin this investigation of collective concerns with a look at these sectarian’s views of social change before turning my attention to their proposed solutions.

It is important to note that when discussing collective concerns, Yang Zanru – and the congregation of sectarians who voiced their opinions through him – is only speaking for himself and his organization, not Taiwanese society writ large. While Orzech states of *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, “It is not hard to discern the social and intellectual milieu of the work, for it is clearly sounding a traditionalist warning in the face of a rapidly modernizing and westernizing society” (1994:113),

³⁴⁵ This young woman, named Yang Xiumei (楊秀梅), is now 32-years-old and did not attend college.

³⁴⁶ Clart (1996:159, n. 14) explains that the educational level of participants of the Taizhong spirit-writing association he studied were somewhat higher than the national average and, as previously mentioned, Ling (2005:216) states that those with a college education are more likely to read morality books, a fact which holds true for those who produce them as well.

³⁴⁷ Clart (2003a:91) has translated this popular saying as “The hearts of humans are not as of old,” which is equally appropriate.

what societal changes are these congregants and spirit-writer most worried about and why?

Many of the societal changes worrisome to sectarians at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies are historically extant. The general collective concern over escalating moral decay and the sorry state of the world was present even before texts like the second century CE *Demon Statutes of Nüqing*, which reveals that descendants do not suffer from ailments caused by the deceased but because they have rejected the Way. This text explains, “Today’s generation lives in an anxious daze. The perverse and chaotic are numerous and disorderly” (Lai 2002:265). This theme of pervasive and ever-increasing moral decay was carried on by early spirit-written accounts like *The Golden Basin of Jade Dew*, published in 1880, which included stories of the Jade Emperor’s resulting anger at mankind and desire to wipe humanity clean. Similar mythologies are still perpetuated at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies.³⁴⁸

There are many parallels between specific historical and contemporary collective concerns, many of which are focused on the social and moral issues that accompany industrialization and global citizenship. The first of these concerns, addressed in both historical and contemporary morality books, is the influx of immoral influences from the West. Song explains that the principal subject addressed by *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld* is the social conditions which existed a decade after the 1911 founding of the Chinese republic. Song reveals that this text “strictly rebukes creating discontent within one’s extended family, mandates that

³⁴⁸ Clart (1996:109) explains that tales of the Jade Emperor’s anger at humankind’s moral depravity can be found in spirit-written scriptures like the *Jade Thearch’s Sacred Scripture for Universal Salvation* (Yuhuang pudu shengjing 玉皇普度聖經), printed in 1972. In *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, Jigong and Yang come across an edict from the Jade Emperor which explains, “In contemporary times, things have changed for the worse as everyday there are robberies, wars, strife, arson, deceit, and drug addiction – the newspapers report these occurrences daily. The Jade Emperor has great pity on human beings and does not want them to fall more deeply into sin and commit more evil deeds” (Yang 1978:80).

everyone work tirelessly to support their parents, and that people not devote all of their energy admiring or pursuing everything of Western origin and style” (Song 1984:5). A similar sentiment can be found in *Record of Journey to the Underworld*. During Yang’s 32nd journey to hell he interviews a sinful soul who has had his heart gouged out. This soul ashamedly reveals, “When I was alive, I was a very learned man and read lots of books. When I went to university, I was interested in current events and was very influenced by Western culture” (Yang 1978:175). As previously mentioned, both historical and contemporary spirit-travelogues have updated their modes of punishment to account for Western-influenced sins, demonstrated in punishments like hell’s dance halls complete with hot iron floors.

Another similarity between specific historical and contemporary collective concerns is a focus on economic prosperity and its corrupting effects. Brokaw explains that the high foreign demand for Chinese luxury items during the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries profoundly impacted the extant social structure as, “With the commercial growth of the period and the increasingly obvious power of money, merchants, though consigned in Confucian social theory to the bottom of the social scale, in fact enjoyed considerable power and social respectability” (1991:5). In addition to upsetting social hierarchies, this economic growth also prompted urban migration and subsequent overcrowding,³⁴⁹ an escalation in crime,³⁵⁰ and an increase in leisure time and energy for new segments of the population.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Spirit-travelogues, like the *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld*, soon included long lists of sins related to asocial behaviors like littering public roads and blocking traffic or canals. As Eberhard explains, “The more recent texts stress much more strongly than the old text the needs and the exigencies of business life in cities” (1967:70).

³⁵⁰ Eberhard reveals that the proliferation of morality books was prompted, in part, by social conditions “in those centuries in which – according to other texts – crimes by juveniles and by urban gangs had been on the increase” (1967:26).

³⁵¹ Eberhard explains that morality books, such as the *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld* and the *Precious Records*, are preoccupied with ritual uncleanness, love potions, and sexual impropriety as from the sixteenth century on, “Novels, plays, and paintings concerned with sex began to circulate widely, in spite of all attempts of the scholars and officials to confiscate the materials and to punish the producers” (1967:65).

Sixty years after spirit-travelogues like the *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld*, congregants at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies were still dealing with similar economically induced issues. Yang's otherworldly guide, Jigong, often depicted as a destitute but joyous monk, derides the curse of economic prosperity with denouncements like, "Material comforts enhance mortal life and people live in massive skyscrapers, yet walls of iron and steel trap individuals within" (Yang 1981:48) and "Every day one exerts all of their strength to earn money, yet this fight with the copper coin only brings misery. Those people who have money are never relaxed or joyful but are surrounded by the many worries that come from their pile of money" (Yang 1981:195).³⁵² The social ills which accompany excessive wealth, gambling (Yang 1978:191), deceit (Yang 1978:80), begging (Yang 1978:90), etc. are also mentioned throughout both *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*.

While there are many similarities between contemporary and historical collective concerns, sectarians at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies are also attempting to grapple with new disturbances. One new concern, considered by these congregants to be in direct competition with their moral mission, is the field of science and technology. *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* are replete with references to the corrupting effects of scientific and technological advancements. The fifth court of hell's King Senluo proposes, "Contemporary science has made so many advances that public morality is not the same as it was in ancient times. Decadence has now taken the upper hand" (Yang 1978:169). This moral decline is blamed on science because sectarians believe it has

³⁵² Jigong also pauses on their 11th journey to hell to tell Yang, "In contemporary times, people dress very well, live in nice houses, and eat very well but they obtain money through unrighteous means. Their actions are like the smell of excrement. When they were alive they enjoyed themselves but when they arrive here they have to encounter this rotten smell and filthy surroundings" (Yang 1978:58).

attempted to remove the mystery of life and possibility of an afterlife.³⁵³ At the beginning of Yang's 32nd journey to hell, his guide Jigong confidently exclaims, "Contemporary scientists claim that science has progressed to such an extent that they are cleverer than nature. They are not aware that they are as a tiny millet in a vast ocean" (Yang 1978:173). Yang also tackles technological issues like automobiles when, during his 38th journey to the underworld, he visits "Hell's Department of Motor Vehicles," where drivers who have injured or killed others on earth are punished.

When Yang Zanru authored *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, he included a range of textual solutions intended to appease congregants' collective concerns over issues like pervasive moral decay and socially disruptive scientific and technological advancements. Some of these basic textual solutions included the utilization of simple³⁵⁴ and repetitive³⁵⁵ language and the inclusion of colorful descriptions of collectively reassuring punishments and rewards. During Yang's 39th journey to hell, congregants are promised that bandits, highway robbers, murderers, those who commit incest, avaricious government officials, groveling underlings, those who have poisoned others, and disobedient, unfilial children – to name just a few – will be punished in the "Lesser Prison of Boiling Oil" (Youfu Gunpeng Xiaodiyu 油釜滾烹小地獄) (Yang 1978:257). Contemporary sins are also comfortingly punished. While visiting hell for

³⁵³ Before hearing the basic Chinese creation story in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* Yang is told, "In this age that privileges the science of evolution, there is little room for the good fortune and mysterious truths of heaven and earth" (Yang 1981:24).

³⁵⁴ Eberhard explains that this textual technique has been employed historically, as the case of the author of the *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld* who "wanted the book so simple that even women and children could read it easily and would find it as interesting as short stories" (1967:27). This trend may have been prompted not because male authors of morality books wanted to altruistically reach a wider audience but because these authors often felt that women and children were some of the most potentially disruptive members of society.

³⁵⁵ Clart explains, "The repetitiveness is quite simply a function of the magnitude of the perceived modern threat to the core values" (2005:106-107).

the 25th time, Yang is told by a former pop star, “I hope that living pop stars will not sing dirty and obscene songs but will sing songs which teach people to be good. Otherwise, when they die their souls will be sent to this ‘Lesser Prison of Mouth-Piercing’ (Cizui Xiaodiyu 刺嘴小地獄) and they will have to sing songs of a different tune (crying) every day” (Yang 1978:136). Members of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies are also promised lavish rewards for upholding moral standards such as fields of immortal flowers (Yang 1981:22), divine teas of vitality (Yang 1981:15), and entertainment in heaven like plays (Yang 1981:87) and chess (Yang 1981:216).

Contemporary changes like technological advancements are not just considered obstacles on the path to cultivation but are used by Yang as another textual solution to combat moral decay, co-optation. Yang has not simply updated the punishments of hell and rewards of heaven to keep pace with a globalizing nation, but has actually co-opted scientific advances to serve his moral mission. Yang incorporates technological advancements into descriptions of the afterlife as a way to control these new – and often frightening – forms of modernization.³⁵⁶ For example, while traveling to heaven for the 34th time, Jigong compares levels of cultivation to cars explaining, “Just like automobiles in the mortal realm have different name brands and prices and are divided by high and mid-level quality or whether they are old or new...Likewise, one gradually becomes a golden-bodied immortal or Buddha. Yet within these beings there are still ranks as there are high and mid-level golden-bodies” (Yang 1981:219). During the subsequent journey to heaven Jigong explains, “When one’s merit is sufficient it is like a complete television which, when the ‘plug’ is inserted, will immediately display an image. One’s marvelous abilities are then limitless” (Yang 1981:224). The lotus flower which ferries Yang and Jigong between

³⁵⁶ Yang devotes an entire section devoted to this topic in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* labeled “Similarities between Ancient and Contemporary.” For a translation see Appendix 8.

the mortal world and the afterlife is also frequently described using technologically inspired terminology.³⁵⁷

Yang not only equates religious phenomena with scientific advancements, but confidently places the credit for technological innovations in the hands of the gods. Jigong sums up this position when he states, on Yang's 10th journey to hell, "You must not think that modern day science is so advanced. People on earth tend to think that there are no such things as spirits or demons. How do you know that it is not the power of spirits that controls modern science and its inventions?" (Yang 1978:50-51). This point is clearly demonstrated in descriptions of an afterlife which features automatically revolving doors, not driven by electricity but by the powers of *yin* and *yang* (Yang 1978:44), large machines which collect the souls of every deceased insect and prepare them for transmigration (Yang 1978:113), and immortals who comfortably reside in space without oxygen and are compared by Jigong to astronauts like Neil Armstrong (Yang 1981:27-28). Heaven's residents, the alleged creators of earth's newest technologies, are portrayed utilizing scientific advancements in ways superior to mortals. Jigong proposes during the 29th journey to hell, "The fact that the deities, through mediums, can cure sicknesses which doctors cannot cure, is due to the magnanimity of the deities in heaven" (Yang 1978:158-159). These statements must be reassuring to a collective clearly concerned with the corrupting effects of science and technology.

Another important textual solution to collective concerns provided by Yang's depictions of the afterlife is the ability to define society's ills (which include a range of

³⁵⁷ Traveling to hell on the lotus flower for the 5th time Yang comments, "Sitting on this lotus flower with closed eyes is exactly like sitting on an airplane" (Yang 1978:251). Jigong starts the 35th journey to heaven saying, "Teacher and disciple sit aboard the lotus flower platform as if riding a cloud vehicle to outer space" (Yang 1981:223). At the end of their last journey to heaven Jigong explains of their mode of transportation, "I have already transported it to its final destination and this heavenly vehicle will be sent to the garage for an overhaul, a new battery, and to be refueled" (Yang 1981:237).

perceived problems from general moral decay to the younger generation's unstoppable usurpation) and assign the guilt for them elsewhere. This definition, or characterization, of collective concerns occurs in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* through something that Samuel Preus (1991:455) has termed the "literalization of allegory." This textual process, which can be seen in books like John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, transpires when an author portrays concrete characters as moral typologies, like vice and virtue. Tales of sinners in hell allow Yang to clearly convey to congregants what they should regard as "evil," while stories of heaven's immortals allow him to personify "good." The structure of historical Chinese conceptions of the afterlife, built in part on Buddhism's system of karmic retribution, also allows Yang the perfect opportunity to assign the guilt for societal woes elsewhere. In addition to forecasting a future in which moral decline is guaranteed, thus allaying sectarians' fears that they may be personally responsible for the sorry state of the world, Buddhism's notion of karma squarely places, as Orzech explains, "the guilt of victimage onto those very victims" (1994:124) while obfuscating the "workings of violence in that very display of violence" (1994:121).³⁵⁸ Congregants are consequently reassured that society's moral decline is unavoidable, foreseen, and not their fault, and that those who are guilty will be justly condemned and punished.

The final textual solution to appease members' collective concerns that Yang has included in his description of heaven and hell is a reawakening of the past and call to engender the qualities of historical personages in the present.³⁵⁹ The past is revived

³⁵⁸ This displacement and obfuscation takes place within most systems of karmic retribution as, "Punishment is not ordained by a god for the transgression of moral precepts. Instead it is the just recompense of deeds set in motion by the victim" (Orzech 1994:120).

³⁵⁹ This textual collapse of past and present has long been employed in Chinese poetry. As Hatfield explains, "In Chinese poetry (and, more broadly, in Taiwanese religious discourse), this type of contrastive juxtaposition suggests gathering and dispersal across time as well as space" (2002:858).

in Yang's account of the afterlife through his employment of classical Chinese, vernacular idioms, and interviews with immortals of historical import. Yang visits heaven's Palace of Loyalty during his 33rd journey where he is told:

From ancient times, those loyal, filial, and righteous all ascended to heaven and became gods. Sitting within the palace is Yue Fei³⁶⁰ and other loyal state ministers and martyrs. They sacrificed their lives for their country and after death their spirits ascended to heaven, their sacrificial stands were covered with incense, and their good name was left for eternity. Others here were incorruptible officials who were not greedy and did not steal but benefited the populace. After death these officials can ascend to heaven to become gods. They will live a carefree and relaxed existence in halls of the Palace of Loyalty or live in the various heavens and undertake sacred responsibilities! [Yang 1981:214]

This revival of the past reassures congregants for several reasons. The first is its demonstration that a respectful and filial attitude can be maintained in this rapidly changing world. Clart explains of morality books, "The massive use of historical figures aims to reconstitute a meaningful history in an age where calls were heard to forget the past and focus on the future, on the building of a New China" (2005:106-107). Another reason is that direct guidance from historical figures is both comforting and lends credence to new teachings.³⁶¹ Finally, this renewed connection with the past adds an import to the lives of sectarians who are awash in the everyday banality of the quickly modernizing world.

While it is easy to see why regression to an idyllic past can provide comfort to collectives, which past – from China's long history – is being recalled and why? Yang's depiction of an ideal past in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* seems to lie somewhere at the intersection of the imperial bureaucracy and honorable agricultural. Or, phrased another way, this

³⁶⁰ General Yue Fei (1103-1141 CE) was a hero during the Song Dynasty.

³⁶¹ As Jordan and Overmyer have proposed, "*Fu-chi* offered a direct way of reviving a tradition that was beleaguered on all sides. Through spirit-writing all the saints and heroes of old could speak again to reassure and give moral direction" (1986:36).

ideal is often portrayed as the moment when a pure-hearted agrarian gains access to all that the imperial bureaucracy can offer without being corrupted. As both Sangren (1987:130) and Nickerson (2001:188) have pointed out, the imperial system on which popular religion in Taiwan is based has not existed since 1911. In Yang's case, the inclusion of this particular historical ideal seems to be a calculated effort: it ties his teachings to historical precedent and thus make them appear more legitimate,³⁶² reassures congregants through the depiction of a bureaucratic system which was viable for a lengthy historical period and thus still most capable of managing a complex afterlife,³⁶³ and appeals to members who identify with this bureaucratic-agrarian ideal and see themselves as bastions of purity, simplicity, and industry in an age of rampant technological progress.

Yang addresses his collective's concerns through more than just textual solutions, proposing active answers as well. These include lists of direct admonitions, discussions of deportment, and encouragements to testify about the sectarian lifestyle to others. Jordan and Overmyer (1986:78) have provided a translation of a representative list of these admonitions for all active members located on the inside cover of the first issue of the semi-monthly publication, *Saints and Worthies* (Shengxian 聖賢). This list reads:

1. Restore the moral principles of constant social obligations
2. Strengthen the national spirit
3. Promote Confucian ethics

³⁶² As Feuchtwang proposes, "Chinese claims to authority are always an appropriation of a 'before' which is at the same time both temporal and extensive for the people over whom authority is claimed. Chinese myths of history characteristically refer to an original state, an anterior order which is at the same time superior and the source for a future and better order" (1992:38).

³⁶³ Cohen explains, "The idea of cosmic stability and continuity loomed large both in state Confucianism and in orthodox popular religion, and for the latter this was achieved by projecting state and society into the supernatural, by seeing the masses of anonymous dead as essentially chaotic (*luan*) but nevertheless under the firm control of priests or supernatural officials, by believing that the familiar dead continued to reside in a more orderly and earth-like portion of the underworld, and finally by equating release from this underworld more with reincarnation or the assumption of godhood than with salvation" (1988:196).

4. Explain and clarify the true principles of the saints and worthies
5. Transform people so that all improve
6. Urge loyalty, moderation, and righteousness
7. Advocate the improvement of popular customs
8. Lead society to good fortune and harmony
9. Promote charity and good works
10. Improve and renew temple congregations

Examples of these active solutions to congregants' concerns of pervasive moral decay are also strewn throughout *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*³⁶⁴ and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*.³⁶⁵ As Yang explains during one journey to heaven, "To be 'loyal, filial, and righteous' is the Chinese tradition of moral excellence and are also the objectives advocated by phoenix halls" (Yang 1981:215).

Proper deportment is another active solution to congregants' collective concerns. The collapse of past and present – facilitated through textual means – also occurs during weekly temple spirit-writing sessions. Clart proposes, "The connectedness of past and present is further emphasized by the traditional scholars' gowns (*changpao*) worn by cult members" (2005:108). This connection to the past allows sectarians to criticize current societal mores while attempting to refashion a more satisfying culture; a process anthropologists have labeled "revitalization" (Lavenda and Schultz 2003:81-82). In addition to historically inspired attire, members also attempt to live according to the rules for relationships advocated by Confucius and are encouraged to approximate an agrarian-inspired existence. Finally, sectarians are expected to actively testify to their friends and family about their Hall's teachings

³⁶⁴ One example, from Yang's 24th journey to the underworld, can be found in one of Jigong's frequent monologues condemning murder, theft, and cheating while begging parents to better educate their children (Yang 1978:127).

³⁶⁵ Another example, from Yang's 22nd journey to heaven, occurs when a Daoist Elder informs Yang that his charitable acts led him to heaven and can do the same for all mortals (Yang 1981:154). An immortal interviewed by Yang on his 17th journey to heaven echoes this sentiment explaining, "I have no notable past in the Way. I merely performed good deeds and donated to the needy without asking for anything in return. I never would have imagined while on earth that performing those good deeds would cause my spirit to enter this miraculous realm" (Yang 1981:128-129).

and the “necessity and desirability of leading a moral life” (Jordan and Overmyer 1986:99).

Individual Desires

Before investigating the individual desires of both Yang Zanru and his sectarian audience, which appear throughout *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, I feel it is necessary to defend my contention that these texts illuminate psychological desires and pathologies. This argument would undoubtedly meet with varied levels of resistance from the author of these texts, the religious adherents who assisted in their production, and some of the scholars who have studied similar morality books. Eberhard, whose sociological surveys include detailed information from texts like the *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld*, argues, “Myths presumably project needs which are overtly denied and repressed and for whose handling the society has few or no institutions. From our knowledge of Chinese literature, this does not apply to the literature used in this study, namely...moralistic treatises” (1967:7). Despite such resistances, I ardently believe that these spirit-travelogues can be psychologically revealing, a theory supported by their patent use of symbolic material,³⁶⁶ possessed mode of production,³⁶⁷ and pervasive employment of individualistic manifestations.

The claim that *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* can reveal their author and co-creators’ individual desires is further supported by the large number of analyses claiming that sectarians in Taiwan are more individually inclined than participants of traditional popular religion.

³⁶⁶ Without attempting too far a theoretical leap, it seems safe to point out that some of Yang’s imagery, his descent to the bottomless Cave of Hell during his first journey to the underworld, the death of his soul and rebirth in the Pond of Happy Hearts during his second journey, Yang’s longing for Jigong’s magic fan that begins as early as his fourth journey to hell, etc. have symbolic meaning.

³⁶⁷ Zeitlin explains, “It is clear that spirit writing was a versatile technique, a language of sorts that could run the gamut from serious religious expression to literary fantasy and party game” (1998:104). This allowed some authors to produce what Pas (1989:44) has labeled “product[s] of imagination.”

Some scholars (Teiser 1995:380; Weller 1999:91; Cohen 1988:199) have commented on the voluntary nature of sectarian membership, which is not determined by familial or communal ties. Jordan and Overmyer propose, “Village religion, with its stress on families, ancestors, exorcism, local politics, and the rest, is quite a different world from that of the sectarian society...Modern Taiwan’s sectarianism is a theatre primarily for individuals, not families” (1986:8). This individualistic attitude can also be seen in sectarian conceptions of cultivation and salvation. While traveling to heaven for the 15th time Yang is told, “Since ancient times, successful cultivation has always been the responsibility of the individual and if you are able to understand truth and the path to cultivation then the road to heaven is evident before you” (Yang 1981:104).³⁶⁸ Salvation too, while generally thought unattainable to adherents of Taiwan’s popular religious traditions, can be individually achieved by worthy sectarians.³⁶⁹

If, as I propose, morality books like *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* reveal individual desires, what do the author and participants of these texts desire? Not surprisingly, both author and congregants express very similar individualistic desires, commonalities which presumably kept them together long enough to complete these – and other – morality books.³⁷⁰ These commonalities were strengthened through a mutual authorization of desires, a “dialectical relationship between authorized, authorizing language and the

³⁶⁸ Jordan and Overmyer further explain, “Probably partly because *pai-luan* is normally neither a universal custom in village society nor an activity undertaken on behalf of or in the name of a family, it has the quality of a uniquely pious act that generates merit almost exclusively for the individual who undertakes to participate” (1986:274).

³⁶⁹ As Cohen (1988:199) explains, one major draw for sectarians is a religious system which allows for the possibility of salvation.

³⁷⁰ While I submit that Yang and his congregation seem to have very similar desires, it is also not surprising that Yang, as the functional leader of this organization, is the only member that has visibly realized many of these desires in this life.

group which authorizes it and acts on its authority” (Bourdieu 1977:171).³⁷¹ These individual desires include: the wish to avoid hell and gain access to heaven, to share in the autonomy enjoyed by the gods, a desire for renown and recognition, a space to practice progression and regression, and a desire to punish and be punished.

While it is a relatively straightforward process to track how Yang voices his individual desires, particularly when one takes the stance – as I have – that it is Yang playing the part of all of the characters in these morality books, how do congregants vocalize their own desires? Congregants can satisfy their individualistic needs in this collective environment through several different methods. The first, and more passive, method occurs when sectarians imagine themselves as residents in the otherworldly realms described in Yang’s spirit-travelogues.³⁷² As Jordan and Overmyer have proposed of sectarians, “In a sense the *pai-luan* believers are right who maintain that by *pai-luan* membership one attains the possibility of living in celestial realms, for the membership provides the context for the creation and maintenance of the realms” (1986:272). Yang’s monologue can thus be viewed as a collective monologue, in which congregants vicariously participate by imagining themselves in Yang’s role as protagonist or as primary participants in the afterlife which he describes.

The second, and more active, method which sectarian congregants employ to satisfy their individual desires through these spirit-travelogues occurs when they attempt to directly influence what Yang wrote about during a specific week.³⁷³ While

³⁷¹ As Boyer similarly states, “A shared daydream is a step toward group formation and solidarity and leads to a sense of mutual identification on the basis of common needs. Myth makers serve the community alongside poets and prophets, presenting communally acceptable versions of wishes which theretofore were expressed in guilt-laden, private fantasy” (1980:272).

³⁷² This process of imagination is similar to a practice which Certeau discerned among factory workers and is labeled, *la perruque* (the “wig”). Certeau explains, “In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way” (1984:25-26).

³⁷³ There are numerous historical examples of how a spirit-writers’ desire to please their congregation has influenced the texts they produce. As Lang and Ragvald explain of a Chinese spirit-writer in the 1890s, “If Leung wished to hold their interest, and induce them to return for further sessions,

authoring *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, Yang frequently met with temple chairpeople and sectarian congregants during weekly spirit-writing sessions, classes, editing meetings, and informal conversations and outings. The direct influence that congregants exerted on his otherworldly journeys is visible in Yang's detailed discussion of trees and flowers in heaven, which represent sectarian members' curiosity concerning their spiritual status (Yang 1981:98), and Yang's visit to hell's City God Temple, which he undertakes to meet with the recently deceased husband of one of the Hall of Sages and Worthies' vice-chairman (Yang 1978:228).

One of the most fundamental individual desires addressed throughout *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is the desire for an enjoyable immortality: to gain access to heaven while avoiding hell entirely. Yang's spirit-travelogues introduce several new and enticing innovations concerning the mode of entry into, and characteristics of, the afterlife. While purgatory was once the initial afterlife destination for all deceased in Taiwan, Yang, during *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, is introduced by a Magistrate of heaven to an "innovative method" (*gexin dufa* 革新度法) which:

Declare[s] a newly emergent truth which allows peoples' spirits to be rescued...All those that enter Phoenix halls and pledge to work towards cultivation will be known in Southern Heaven. Those able to work diligently towards cultivation and accumulate merit will, after they have passed away, have ample reason to ask Ji Gong to return here to Southern Heaven and report their arrival. [Yang 1981:15-16]

In contradistinction to previous accounts, which portrayed the road to heaven as narrow and rarely traveled (Gjertson 1989:200), Yang hopes that all sentient beings will "experience for themselves the large road that we are traveling upon today and the

personalized messages from the gods to persons in attendance could be especially effective" (1998:316).

strange and wonderful sights that we are introducing in this travelogue while observing the mysterious scenes in the halls of heaven” (Yang 1981:166). Yang also provides a detailed outline of the system of merit accumulation which will allow sectarian members to gain immediate access to heaven.³⁷⁴

Yang’s description of hell, which is horribly gruesome, is matched by his description of heaven, painted as exceptionally pleasurable. Just as Segal (2007) wrote that conceptions of heaven shifted in contemporary America to resemble an eternal retirement village, Yang describes a paradise strikingly similar to the lavish lifestyle which he denounces on earth. Yang observes, during his 20th journey to heaven, “Beneath these peach trees there are many immortal children and female immortals at play. There are also many Daoist immortals on stone stools talking and playing checkers. Yet others are picking and eating the immortal peaches. They live within this appealing and worry-free environment which is envied by people on earth” (Yang 1981:142). Yang also reveals that the immortal residents of heaven are entertained by plays (1981:87), invited to sumptuous banquets (1981:211), and is even promised his very own golden, heavenly villa (1981:72).

The next individual desire addressed in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is the desire to attain the same autonomy and power enjoyed by the gods. Freud famously stated that citizens long ago “formed an ideal conception of omnipotence and omniscience which he embodied in his gods. To these gods he attributed everything that seemed unattainable to his wishes, or that was forbidden to him. One may say, therefore, that these gods were cultural ideals. To-day he has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, he has

³⁷⁴ On Yang’s 30th journey to heaven, an Imperial Official of Heaven shows him a book which records all merits, assigning five points for attending a spirit-writing session, one hundred merits for donating money to help with the cost of publishing morality books, and three hundred merits for seeing lewd material and avoiding it (Yang 1981:200).

almost become a god himself” (Freud 1961:44). On his 11th journey to heaven, Yang is lectured by one of heaven’s rulers, Yuanshi Tianzun, who explains that humankind’s autonomy, food, clothing, residences, transportation, and technology is on par with – or better than – that of the gods (Yang 1981:81-82).³⁷⁵ Perhaps the most obvious show of individual desire for the power of the gods occurs during Yang’s 8th journey to hell. During their descent, Yang’s guide waves a magic fan to open the foreboding gates of hell.³⁷⁶ Yang exclaims, “My dear master, can you please give me your magic fan to use on Earth? I will show people my magic power by using your fan.” Yang is quickly admonished, “You must not indulge in vain hopes and immoral thoughts. If you have immoral thoughts you will suffer. Those who practice asceticism need not have magic powers, they must control their mind and their inner soul must be settled...Why then do you ask for my fan? Do you want to show off?” (Yang 1978:39). Yang’s guide continues to use his magic fan throughout their trips to heaven and hell before Jigong finally discloses, on Yang’s 36th and final journey to heaven, “I will give you a rush-leaf fan from which blows a pure breeze. You are now free to travel throughout the earth and seek out those people who are fated!” (Yang 1981:235).³⁷⁷

The third individual desire found in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is the desire for renown and recognition. Yang is frequently told throughout both otherworldly journeys that he

³⁷⁵ Yuanshi Tianzun finishes this statement by explaining that while people on earth may be fortunate, they still lack what Yang and his sectarians deeply desire, immortality (Yang 1981:81).

³⁷⁶ A magical fan similar to the one which Ji Gong possesses can be seen in chapters fifty-nine through sixty-one of *Journey to the West*.

³⁷⁷ This tension between Yang’s desire for supernatural power and his powers of self-denial or understanding that such individualistic desires are discouraged can also be seen in the heavenly pills, teas, fruits, and wines that he is frequently given. During Yang’s 43rd journey to hell he tells Jigong that it is too cold and he needs some more pills of immortality. Jigong replies, “You must not succumb so easily to your imagination. Anyhow, I will give you one pill. Swallow it quickly and mount the lotus flower platform” (Yang 1978:239). Yang is similarly given a heavenly pill when he lacks confidence (Yang 1978:293), needs more energy (Yang 1981:23), or has trouble focusing (Yang 1978:25). For more on the history of similar immortal elixirs and pills in China see Teiser (1996:10).

should regard this opportunity “with great pride” (Yang 1978:60), “this is unprecedented in history” (Yang 1981:195), and even, “this medium from the Hall of the Sages and Worthies is really quite famous. Your brain is not like an ordinary person” (Yang 1978:170). At the end of his final journey to heaven, Yang reveals to Jigong, “I am grateful that you have quickened my spirit and bestowed intelligence upon me. You have ensured that my ancestors and I will receive much glory” (Yang 1981:237). These spirit-travelogues are not the only opportunity that Yang was afforded to seek fame and recognition. While still leading spirit-writing sessions at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies, Yang established his own Buddhist temple in 1980, called the Precious Palace of Sacred Virtue (Shengde Baogong 聖德寶宮), which now features its own publishing division, a health food store and organic farm, and a sister temple in the capital city of Taipei.

While it is easy to see that Yang Zanru clearly craved renown in text and real life, I would argue that his congregants desire a similar level of recognition. Yang writes, on his first journey to heaven, that he looked back at earth and saw the Hall of the Sages and Worthies “emitting many rays of golden light that shoot into the sky like a rainbow or large searchlight piercing the sky” (Yang 1981:8). Heaven’s Magistrate Wen Heng calls the Hall of the Sages and Worthies the “world’s most precious and virtuous temple” (Yang 1981:19) while one of hell’s officers states, “I understand that the Hall of the Sages and Worthies is very famous. Your numerous books, written through the planchette and aimed at advising mortals to do good, are very much appreciated and understood by us here” (Yang 1978:95). Yang’s attempt to stroke his congregants’ egos in these spirit-travelogues by promising them renown and recognition (if only in the afterlife), clearly struck a cord with sectarians who still loudly and easily boast to visitors that the texts they helped create, or watched created, are shipped around the world in large numbers.

The fourth desire found in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is for a space to freely practice individual progression and regression. Producing or reading spirit-travelogues can provide author and reader the opportunity to individually progress. Russell proposes that spirit-writing, in the lives of late-traditional Chinese literati, “afforded those who engaged in it an extension of their social lives, and...provided a medium for expression beyond the confines of earthbound society” (1990:110). Similarly, Yang’s spirit-travelogues, which feature sessions of poetry composition with the gods (Yang 1981:131-132), numerous discussions of self-cultivation, and self-reflective interrogations into the imaginative aspects of spirit-writing, provide an imaginatively challenging forum in which an individual can intellectually or spiritually grow.³⁷⁸

More significantly, these spirit-travelogues provide a rare space in Taiwanese culture for adult individuals in a collective setting to regularly regress. While producing – and later reading – these spirit-travelogues, men and women can act childlike and exhibit emotions generally not expressed in public. Mr. Chen, the son of a Hall of the Sages and Worthies Chairman, explained that when Yang wrote *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* he would often “lose his temper” (*fa piqui* 發脾氣). Mr. Chen revealed, “If Yang felt like participating members were not paying enough attention his body would tense, he would begin to write very violently with the planchette, and sometimes he would

³⁷⁸ During his 13th journey to heaven, Yang acknowledges the imaginative aspects of the enterprise in which he is involved. Lord Dong Hua explains, “Because Mr. Yang is easily spiritually elevated he is able to travel to heaven, hell, and the human realm. This is certainly not by chance but is because you have a free heart. You should feel privileged to see these realms, what more could you ask for?” Yang replies, “I am grateful for Lord Dong Hua’s praise. This is like a children’s cartoon. It does not matter to children if what they are shown is real or not. When they are watching it they are happy and forget about those around them. They watch with great enjoyment and this is certainly their amusement park of ideas.” Lord Dong Hua concludes, “Ah ha! A great mystery is understood. The mind creates heaven, the mind creates hell” (Yang 1981:98).

throw his stick across the room.”³⁷⁹ In addition to temper tantrums, Yang is teased about being greedy on his 19th journey to heaven (Yang 1981:137), scared that he might be punished during his 16th journey to hell for cheating on an exam in school (Yang 1978:87), cries when he believes that he lacks the strength to continue during his 32nd journey to heaven (Yang 1981:208), and constantly expresses a childlike fear when confronted with the horrific scenes of hell and amazement when shown the delights of heaven.

Yang also regresses while pining for his immortal mother’s attention. He makes secret confessions and pleads for her help (Yang 1981:133), expresses extreme happiness at her smile (Yang 1981:137), and reveals, while visiting the Golden Mother on his 19th journey to heaven that he “feels as if I am returning to my natal home” (Yang 1981:138).³⁸⁰ Jigong, Yang’s guide throughout his journeys to heaven and hell, is cast in the role of father. Yang undergoes a spiritual rebirth when he is pushed into the “Pond of Happy Hearts” (*qingxin chi* 清心池) on his 2nd journey to hell and is symbolically reborn by a wave of Jigong’s fan (Yang 1978:11). Jigong also provides both geographical guidance through the afterlife and practical guidance through adulthood, reminding Yang to take care of his appearance (Yang 1978:246) and motivating him to complete his responsibilities promising, “Until our task is complete we must apply the whip!” (Yang 1981:161). On Yang’s 32nd journey to heaven Jigong at last reveals, “Teacher and disciple are like father and son” (Yang 1981:211).

³⁷⁹ These angry outbursts by spirit-writers are prevalent in the historical record. Lang and Ragvald explain that a 1890s Chinese spirit-writer, attempting to impress his audience with the power of the gods, “flung the *fujii*-stick violently across the room, frightening the worshippers” (1998:318). Russell states that during one spirit-writing session a Chan monk was visibly upset at his peers for participating in what he deemed a vulgar practice and, “The planchette moved and shook as though it were angry as it continued to write, ‘In the next three days I will release a tiger and order it to eat [someone]’” (1990:128).

³⁸⁰ The Golden Mother reveals, during Yang’s 20th journey to heaven, “Yes! My son Yang has returned again to my residence and I feel extremely happy! As mother I miss all original spirits and my heart aches for them” (Yang 1981:141).

The final individual desire I will discuss, present in both *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, is the desire to punish and be punished. Some of the punishments in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* are quite sadistic. For example, during their 37th journey to hell, Yang comes across some male souls who were lewd or violated the monastic laws of Buddhism prohibiting sexual relations. In this hell, sinful souls have their penis cut off and, as the officer of this hell explains, “Rats attack the remaining roots of the penis in order to cut off the source of their sexual evil” (Yang 1978:202). Certainly one motivating factor for participation in a horrific imaginary like Chinese conceptions of hell is that author/congregants enjoy some level of vicarious sadism.³⁸¹ If we delve deeper, I believe that there is another reason sectarians at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies are so gleefully complicit in the process of torture present in these spirit-travelogues, their sense of moral justice that demands the “well-deserved” punishment of all perpetrators.³⁸² As Ling states, “The morality presented in morality books appeals to the reader not only through examples and expositions, but also to a large extent through the idea of moral retribution, that is, the belief that the virtuous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished” (2005:209).³⁸³ The violent physical tortures of hell and exclusionary tortures of heaven also appeal to congregants sense of moral justice because, “Torture is an exercise in deconstructing the world of the victim and replacing his or her voice with that of the torturer” (Orzech 1994:124).

³⁸¹ Orzech explains that depictions of Chinese hell are particularly sadistic as victims can always be revived to receive additional punishment. He explains, “The hells resemble a torturer’s paradise: there is never the embarrassing and potentially troublesome death of prisoners while in custody” (Orzech 1994:119).

³⁸² This phrase, “well-deserved punishment,” occurs throughout *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* (Yang 1978:27, 36, 69).

³⁸³ Ling (2005:209-210) goes on to explain that there are two types of interrelated retribution: divine retribution (borrowed from Daoism and popular religion) meted out by the gods and karmic retribution (borrowed from Buddhism) in which an individual punishes themselves through their own actions.

While the sadistic desire to torture others is found throughout these spirit-travelogues, the masochistic desire to be tortured can be seen as well.³⁸⁴ Through Jigong, Yang constantly castigates himself with statements like, “You are very lazy. Being a holy man you should be able to endure any type of inconvenience and hardship. How can one expect you to complete more good deeds?” (Yang 1978:10). This same harsh criticism is meted out to congregants when Yang visits trees and flower bushes in the afterlife which represent each member of the congregation. Yang views trees with fruit that is spoiling, crooked branches, and trunks that are cracked and flower bushes that are wilting, have sparse blooms, or have failed to bloom altogether (Yang 1981:98-107).³⁸⁵

Analogous to collective concerns, individual desires are sought both in the texts of these spirit-travelogues and actively as well. For example, the desire for recognition and renown can be found in text and in the weekly ritual of spirit-writing.³⁸⁶ Jigong begins the last journey to heaven with this statement: “We have traveled throughout all of heaven and our heavy burden is lighter at last. This spirit-travelogue came to life in front of the eyes of mortals. It is a play about the “scenery in the halls of heaven and the life of gods and immortals” that was richly and joyfully performed by Mr. Yang and I” (Yang 1981:230). Yang is certainly not the only performer at these spirit-writing sessions. Jordan and Overmyer propose, “It appears probable that many *pai-luan* believers use their sectarian affiliation to provide a center, almost a kind of stage, which they populate with quite private visitations from

³⁸⁴ Hillman similarly proposes that hell, “Is not a far-off place of judgment over our actions but provides that place of judging now, and within, the inhibiting reflection interior to our actions” (1979:29-30).

³⁸⁵ One example of this harsh criticism occurs during Yang’s 15th journey to heaven when he sees a tree which is of medium stature, has black spots on its leaves, and has not produced any fruit. He is told, “This is Mr. (name omitted)’s tree of original spirit. Although Mr. (name omitted) has attained cultivation, his earlier mistakes have not yet been washed cleaned and he sometimes he still commits these evil acts. This action adds to his demerits and before it’s too late I hope that he discards this harmful behavior and enthusiastically pursues cultivation” (Yang 1981:105).

³⁸⁶ According to members of the Taiwan Mediums’ Association, the organization’s gatherings and séances are “like a Taiwanese opera without a script” (Tsai 2004:63).

gods who appear to them in dream, waking visions, or other contexts” (1986:102). I will now investigate another otherworldly stage on which participants can act out collective concerns and individual desires, mythological theme parks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE

In this chapter I analyze the role of mythological theme parks in contemporary Taiwan. I will investigate three popular theme parks, Madou's Prefecture that Represents Heaven (Dai tianfu 代天府), its single Taiwanese precedent, Zhanghua's Palace of Southern Heaven (Nan tiangong 南天宮), and the Pure Land Cave (Qingtu dong 清土洞) located at Taiwan's largest Buddhist monastery, the Light of Buddha Mountain (Foguang shan 佛光山). I call these sites "mythological theme parks" because they differ in form and function from other popular religious temples throughout Taiwan and China. Mythological theme parks are characterized by sculptural and animatronic scenes of representations of the afterlife and popular Chinese legends.³⁸⁷ Though both theme park and temple are loci of religious and cultural production and influence, the setting, participants' expectations, and the nature of interaction at mythological theme parks more closely resembles that of secular theme parks (Gottdiener 1997; Hannigan 1998) than temples. My study addresses both textual sources and ethnographic data, collected while conducting fieldwork during the summers of 2004 and 2005 and the academic year of 2006-07, to

³⁸⁷ These physical representations of heaven and hell are certainly not inimitable to East Asia. Note, for example, "Disneyland on the Ganges," a twenty-five acre Hindu mythological theme park constructed in India (McCaul 2005). Strikingly similar locations have also been recorded in the U.S. since 1995, when evangelical and Pentecostal ministers began to view Halloween as a time to spread their message. Clark states, "Keenan Roberts, an associate pastor of the Abundant Life Christian Center in a suburb of Denver, packaged and sold a seven-scene morality play he'd begun two years earlier, which he had called *Hell House*. Each room of the Hell House features a scene that depicts the negative consequences for teenagers involved in sin. Drunken teens die in a fiery car crash. Others die in gang-related shootings, by suicide as a result of incest, in an abortion clinic, or of a drug overdose at a rave party. And, most controversially, a homosexual teen dies of AIDS" (2003:37). These Hell Houses have since spread across the U.S. with names like "The Nightmare," "The Judgment House," and "Heaven and Hell House." This phenomenon has also recently been recorded in George Ratliff's documentary *Hell House*, which follows members of the Trinity Assembly of God in Dallas, Texas as they create a haunted house based on the horrors of Christian notions of hell.

evaluate how creators of, and visitors to, these mythological theme parks are influenced by their participation.³⁸⁸

Claude Lévi-Strauss proposes that for any type of magic to be effective three complementary components must be present: a capable magician, a cogitative audience, and a stage on which the drama between magician and audience can play out (1963:168). I will begin by examining the structure of mythological theme parks, the stage on which this religious and cultural magic occurs. Secular and religious theme parks are acknowledged as influential sites of cultural production, reinforcing social surroundings through their over-exaggerated depictions of societal norms and taboos. The moral *mise-en-scene* featured at these locations is so ubiquitous in Taiwan that David Jordan (2004:59) has termed it the “mental furniture” that consciously and unconsciously accompanies many Taiwanese throughout their everyday actions. Yet who designed, built, and maintained this mental furniture?³⁸⁹ I will next investigate the role of our magicians, the creators or “imagineers”³⁹⁰ of these mythological theme parks, and their intended collective effect. Theme park imagineers ardently endeavor to encourage self-identification of visitors with the animatronic actors and actresses in each fantastical scene. This is attempted through strategically placed mannequins in modern dress, casually playing *shangqi* with Daoist immortals in heaven or agonizingly having their eyes poked out as karmic retribution in hell. Yet despite these creators’ best intentions, mythological theme parks provide an imaginary world in which participants invert social hierarchies – a process akin to that which Bakhtin

³⁸⁸ This fieldwork was generously funded by a Cornell University Mario Einaudi Center for International Study travel grant, an Aisiang Cultural Foundation Su Tian-shui Memorial Fellowship (*Jinian Su Tianshui xiansheng nanyang xue yanjiu jiang* 紀念蘇添水先生南瀛學研究獎), and a Fulbright-Hays DDRA.

³⁸⁹ As Maurice Godelier reminds us, agency should not be granted to societal (or physical) structures as, “It is not society which conceals something of itself from men; it is real humans beings who conceal something of their social relations from each other” (1999, 173).

³⁹⁰ This wonderfully tacky term, an amalgamation of imagination and engineer, is used by Disney to describe its employees.

(1968) discerns in carnival – as often as they reinforce societal mores. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a look at individual visitors, some of whom are coerced to attend while others willingly participate. How are these visitors influenced by their brief journeys through representations of heaven and hell and do these animatronic depictions alleviate or exacerbate thoughts of individual immortality and punishment?

Stage: Mythological Theme Parks

Anne Goodrich, amazed by the sculptural depictions of hell presented at Beijing's Temple of the Eastern Peak, innocently asked if it was "the only temple in China with representations of the Eighteen Hells" (1981:75-76). Ancient and contemporary mythological theme parks are actually located throughout East Asia (Hendry 2000; Raz 1999). Some of the most notable mythological theme parks of the modern era include the Tiger Balm Gardens in Hong Kong and Singapore (Brandel and Turbeville 1998), the City of Ghosts in Fengdu, China (Lin 1993:135-144; Chenivresse 1998; Wu 2001), Shanxi's Temple of the Eastern Peak (Li 1990) and, of course, the Temple of the Eastern Peak visited by Goodrich (1981) in Beijing. I will begin my investigation of mythological theme parks with an inquiry into the historical background of these locations before moving to a detailed discussion of the three sites where I conducted detailed ethnographic research: the Prefecture that Represents Heaven, the Palace of Southern Heaven, and the Pure Land Cave.

Historically, there are two primary precursors to the sculptural representations of heaven and hell found in Chinese mythological theme parks, stone grottos and hell scrolls. One example of a Chinese grotto which features stone sculptures of scenes of heaven and hell is located at Baodingshan, just north of Dazu City in Sichuan Province. Karil Kucera (2005:1) explains that Baodingshan, which features a monastic complex and two stone grottos, underwent primary construction during the Southern Song period (1127-1270 CE) and was active as a religious site until the late Ming

dynasty (1368-1644 CE). Just like mythological theme parks today, McNair (2000:186-187) states that these types of grottos historically served as the setting for local worship, auxiliary image halls to sponsoring temples, as possible space for group rituals, and as a physical bastion against the supposed decay of the dharma in the latter days of Buddhism.

The stone sculptures of heaven and hell located at Baodingshan feature many visual elements found in contemporary mythological theme parks including: large sculptural depictions of the Pure Land and its resident deity Amitabha (Kucera 2005:3); images of Ksitigarbha bodhisattva, the Ten Kings, and their horse-headed assistants (Kucera 2005:7-11); and portrayal of the eighteen hells (Kucera 2005:7). Another similarity is that the heavenly and hellish scenes at Baodingshan, “Are not only depicted in sculptural form, but also lovingly detailed in narrative texts that accompany each work” (Kucera 2005:7). Kucera reveals that a life-size sculpture of a monk, located within the lowest level of hell and at the eye-level with visitors, is surrounding by the inscription, “Heaven’s hall are vast and broad, yet hell is also vast; not believing in the Buddha’s word, then how the heart suffers! My Way is to seek pleasure in the midst of suffering, but all sentient beings (being confused) seek pain in the midst of pleasure” (2005:14).³⁹¹ These stone grottos, which often feature sculptural scenes of heaven and hell, are located throughout China (Teiser 1994b:639; McNair 2000:161).

While silk paintings excavated from the second century BCE Ma Wang Dui (馬王堆) tombs in Hunan, China record vivid visual depictions of heaven, the human realm, and the underworld (Yü 1987:367), the first recorded painter to exclusively

³⁹¹ Other inscriptions at Baodingshan read: “Heaven’s halls and hell, with one stroke are by the mind created” while the character “good” (*shan* 善) is linked to that of “good fortune” (*fu* 福) and “happiness” (*le* 樂) and the character “evil” (*e* 惡) leads to “misfortune” (*huo* 禍) and “suffering” (*ku* 苦)” (Kucera 2005:15).

produce works of art focused on the afterlife was the late seventh century's Zhang Xiaoshi (張孝師). Zhang's biography is featured in the *Register of Painters in the Xuan He Era* (Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜). This text explains, "Having once died and returned to life, he was especially skilled in painting pictures of hell. These were all [scenes of] what he had seen on his journey in the dark world and could not be compared to pictures drawn from imagination" (Teiser 1988:193). Zhang's representations of purgatory were carried on by three generations of his students, the most famous being Wu Daozi (吳道子), also known as Wu Daoxuan (吳道玄).

Wu Daozi (c. 680-740 CE) is one of the most prominent and prolific artists of representations of the afterlife.³⁹² Wu's artwork served as a primary reference for many of his Tang and Song successors.³⁹³ Wu's artistic career began in the field of calligraphy, but he did not achieve recognition until he started painting. His artwork has been called extreme realism. One description states that his figures "might have been drawn from lantern-shadows on the wall. They seem to walk out of the picture and back into it; they project, can be seen from each side. The flat planes and titled angles fit into one another as though by a natural geometric law" (Waley 1923:116). Others have described Wu's paintings as lifelike sculptures which "seem actually to live and move" (Waley 1923:117).³⁹⁴ Teiser explains that Wu's subjects included

³⁹² Wu was born in the north-central Chinese province of Henan. Arthur Waley (1923:112) explains that Wu lost both his parents as a young boy and grew up in poverty. From a very young age he excelled at painting and soon filled his neighborhood of Loyang with his pictures. Once word of his skill reached the emperor in the capital city of Chang-an he was summoned to the capital to serve as an official and was charged with teaching the court ladies writing, arithmetic, and the fine arts (Waley 1923:112).

³⁹³ For more on Wu's influence on other early Chinese painters, such as Yan Hui, and their representations of demons, exorcists, and hell scenes, see Lee (1993).

³⁹⁴ One of Wu's students, Lu Lengqie (盧稜伽), carried on his master's tradition painting a notable scene of hell at the Huadu Monastery (Huadu Si 化度寺) in Chang-an. The *Register of Painters in the Xuan He Era* reveals that while Lu's artwork was usually noticeably inferior to that of Wu Daozi, Wu noticed one of Lu's large paintings and exclaimed, "Usually this disciple's brush work does not match mine, but here he falls in the same class. Ah, this disciple – his lively spirit is truly exhausted in this" (Teiser 1988b:443). When Lu did expend the energy necessary to produce artwork that rivaled that of his teacher, he died only a month after his teacher's fateful pronouncement. Some of Wu's pupils actually became sculptors, a career path which Waley terms "the refuge of unsuccessful painters" (1923:119).

“scenery, dragons, the Pure Land, hells, ghosts and spirits, Celestial Venerables, and numerous Buddhas and bodhisattvas” (1988b:441). Although none are still in existence, Wu’s most notable representations of the afterlife were located at the Bright and Honorable Monastery (Jinggong Si 景公寺) in Chang-an and the Temple of First Fortune (Fuxian Si 福先寺) in Loyang (Teiser 1988:441).

Liu Azu (劉阿祖) was one of the first recorded painters of scenes of heaven and hell in the Tang dynasty. Liu is best known for his two paintings, “The Sixteen Visualizations” and the “Transformation of King Yama,” at the Monastery of Veneration and Love (Jiangai Si 敬愛寺) in Loyang.³⁹⁵ Though scripturally linked to a tradition of monastic meditation, Teiser explains of this artwork, “It is noteworthy that they were painted in the metropolitan temples of T’ang China – places frequented by laypeople, non-meditators the majority of whom had no exclusive ties to Buddhism” (1988b:445). Liu’s artwork drew from popular tales of the time, such as *Mulian Saves his Mother*, and featured the heavenly palaces of Brahma and bureaucratic courts of hell.

As the protagonist of the ninth century Dunhuang manuscript *The Record of a Returned Soul* (Huanhun ji 還魂記), the monk Daoming (道明) also plays an important role in the history of artistic representations of the afterlife during the Song dynasty. Daoming, summoned to purgatory because of a mistaken moniker, encounters Ksitigarbha on his return but fails to recognize him. Teiser recounts Ksitigarbha’s reply, “You must observe closely the appearance [of my demeanor and comportment], noting clearly my proportions one by one, so that you can transmit them to the world” (1988b:448). This story, which helped to codify Ksitigarbha’s

³⁹⁵ Teiser (1988b:444-445) explains that the sixteen visualizations (*shiliu guan* 十六觀) are the consecutive meditative images which Śākyamuni instructed Queen Vaidehī to cultivate in the *Amitāyur Buddhānasmṛti Sūtra* (Guan wuliang shou fojing 觀無量壽佛經). This visualization also involves focusing on Amitābha’s Pure Land. A translation of this sutra can be found in *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 44.

position as the ruler of the ten kings of the underworld, similarly spread and solidified the legend of Daoming. Teiser explains, “Tao-ming secured an even more honorable position in the netherworld in the twelfth century, when, known under the homophonous name of Tao-ming 導冥 [‘Guide through the Dark Regions’], he was believed to act as a compassionate guide who helped orient the spirits of recent arrivals in hell” (1988b:450).

The final artistic representations of hell in the medieval era were produced in the twelfth century as accompanying illustrations to copies of *The Sūtra of the Ten Kings*. Teiser explains, “The illustrated versions depict more than simply the ten kings; they flesh out in considerable detail the dreaded machinery of justice in the otherworld. Each king is accompanied by attendants, standard-bearers, clerks, ox-headed guards, and wardens” (1988b:451). It is from these illustrations that representations of hell became mass-produced works of art. Following the tradition of the ten kings of hell, representations of hell in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century were produced in modular sets of ten, one scroll for each court. These hell scrolls, still produced by artists today, were (and are) popular as ritual,³⁹⁶ entertainment,³⁹⁷ teaching tool,³⁹⁸ filial offering,³⁹⁹ and money-making venture.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Hell scrolls are still used as part of funerary ritual in contemporary Taiwan today. Historically, one of Wu Daozi’s famous scenes – described as containing ghosts and spirits and, most likely, scenes of hell – was produced at the behest of the Tang general Pei Min (裴旻) to assist his recently deceased mother. Teiser (1988b:442) reveals that according to the *Register of Painters in the Xuan He Era*, Wu asked Pei Min to shed his funerary appurtenances and don his military uniform to perform a sword dance. Wu absorbed the vital energy produced by this spectacle and began his depiction of the netherworld in assistance of Pei Min’s mother. Teiser explains of Pei Min, “While he may not have expected to play such an active role in a public performance, his actions make clear the intimate connection that existed between art and ritual in medieval times” (1988b:442).

³⁹⁷ Teiser proposes of these illustrated scrolls, “The performative use of such pictures also suggests that their primary function was to edify and, above all, to entertain” (1988:446).

³⁹⁸ Donnelly (1990:8) explains that some of the temple murals which vividly depicted scenes of the underworld were said to be so compelling during the Tang dynasty that a butcher was convinced to abandon his livelihood for a career less sinful.

³⁹⁹ Ledderose (2000) explains that in many older hell scrolls the denizens of hell can be seen presenting sutras that they copied during their lifetimes, or those copied for them by their descendants.

⁴⁰⁰ Ledderose speculates that the owners of workshops may have tempted customers with the offer of painting deceased relatives as those holding copied sutras; prisoners in hell that would forego torture or

In the pre-modern era, stone grottos and artwork patterned after conceptions of the afterlife were combined to form what have been termed “Chambers of Horror” (Giles 1911; Jordan 2004). These chambers were located in popular religious temples which were often, but not always, devoted to the Emperor of the Eastern Peak (Dongyue dadi 東嶽大帝) or the City God (Chenghuang 城隍), as both were thought to be involved in the process of registering and allocating souls as they entered hell.⁴⁰¹ Pu Songling’s *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, published in 1740, includes a tale called “Judge Lu” (Pu 1946:149-159), which references the frightening place these locations held in popular imagination. This tale states:

Now in the temple at Ling-yang were represented the Ten Courts of the Underworld, with all the gods and devils carved in wood and looking as though actually alive. In the eastern corridor stood an image of the Judge, with a green face and red beard – the most fierce and repulsively hideous of them all. Sometimes from both corridors sounds of trials under torture were heard, so that those who entered the temple found their hair standing on end. [Pu 1946:149]

Eberhard has located a Ming text that describes a temple in Jiangsu province featuring, “Large-scale statues which could be moved by a hidden system of levers and which then enacted gruesome activities. The mechanism operated automatically as soon as a person entered the temple and stepped on the levers. People did not dare to enter this temple during darkness” (1967:57). This Jiangsu temple sounds strikingly similar to a temple constructed in Beijing just before the start of the Ming dynasty.

Beijing’s Temple of the Eastern Peak, erected in 1322 (Goodrich 1981:6), is an excellent example of a pre-modern precursor to contemporary mythological theme

soon be released due to this merit (2000:173). Some hell scroll artists included the full address of their studios in their scrolls “in order to help potential buyers find it” (Ledderose 2000:167). Teiser similarly proposes of the mass-produced hell scrolls of the post-medieval era, “The later paintings carry the marks not of ritual but of commerce” (1988b:453-454).

⁴⁰¹ Eberhard’s (1967:55) extensive temple survey of Central and South China, which includes information on nearly 12,000 temples, includes seventy-six references to temples for the God of the Eastern Peak. Temples devoted to the City God were much more prevalent.

parks. When Goodrich visited the temple in the early twentieth century, it featured sculptural depictions of the eighteen levels of hell.⁴⁰² Goodrich writes, “Each was shown with the king, or judge, seated on high behind an alter table. Attendants stood along the side walls and the sinners took up space in front accompanied by demon attendants. On the door posts of each cubicle, or niche, were mottoes admonishing folk to keep to the right way with all their hearts, for the end of one’s life span is not far away” (1981:43).⁴⁰³ Sins are depicted as being judged through two methods, souls are hung from hooks to determine their level of sin (Goodrich 1981:45) and, in the Hell of Brimstone, there is a “mirror into which souls can gaze to see in what form they will be reborn” (Goodrich: 1981:53). Other popular figures found in representations of hell, such as Mother Meng, are also present (Goodrich 1981:49). Goodrich explains that for some residents of Beijing in the 1930s, “Part of...life is a visit to this temple in childhood, with parents trying to drive home ethical standards taught at home by showing the child a vivid portrayal of what will happen to him if he doesn’t behave” (1981:3).

While most of the temple’s figures were made from simple plaster molded around wooden forms, there were also some of the technological advances found at

⁴⁰² The eighteen hells featured in Beijing’s Temple of the Eastern Peak include: 1. Upside Down Hell (*Daoxuan diyu* 倒懸地獄), 2. Hell of Being Cut to Pieces (*Tuge diyu* 屠割地獄), 3. Hell of the Grindstone (*Moyan diyu* 磨研地獄), 4. Hell of the Copper Pillar (*Tongzhu diyu* 銅柱地獄), 5. Hell of the Iron Bed (*Tiechuang diyu* 鐵床地獄), 6. Hell of the Knife Mountain (*Daoshan diyu* 刀山地獄), 7. Hell of the Pounding Mortar (*Duidao diyu* 碓搗地獄), 8. Hell of Boiling Oil (*Huotang diyu* 鑊湯地獄), 9. Hell of the Vast Cold (*Mingleng diyu* 冥冷地獄), 10. Hell of the River of Ashes (*Huihe diyu* 灰河地獄), 11. Hell of the Thunderbolt (*Jingang diyu* 金剛地獄), 12. Hell of the Fire Wagon (*Huoche diyu* 火車地獄), 13. Hell of Wind and Thunder (*Fenglei diyu* 風雷地獄), 14. Hell of Brimstone (*Xiashi diyu* 硤石地獄), 15. Hell of the Fire Screen (*Huoyi diyu* 火翳地獄), 16. Hell of the Saw (*Jujie diyu* 鋸解地獄), 17. Hell of the Plow (*Ligeng diyu* 犁耕地獄), and 18. Hell of Cold Ice (*Hanbing diyu* 寒冰地獄) and the Bloody Pond (*Suoxue hu* 索血湖) (Goodrich 1981:43-44).

⁴⁰³ These admonishments also include statements like, “To die, to be born – the two ideas are the same. After death you are weighed to see if your sins are light or heavy! You will regret it if during your life span you do not sharpen your thinking. At the turn of the wheel there is no high class, no low class. Blood and tears drop down. Now you receive the punishment of hanging upside down if you have tried to seduce others. After death it will be difficult to escape the sharp sword” (Goodrich 1981:43).

other early mythological theme parks, like the one in Jiangsu. In fact, Goodrich explains that according to popular imagination, the temple closed because, “A man visiting the temple had been scared to death, literally. There was a secret mechanism in front of one of the hells; if one stood on a certain spot a demon would pop up, catching the unsuspecting person in the loop of a chain as if to drag him to Hell” (1981:6). In all likelihood, this temple was closed because of the 1928 order that all temples labeled “superstitious” be shut down. Pas explains that today, Beijing’s Temple of the Eastern Peak has been “totally broken down in the ‘post-liberation’ period, as fostering superstition” (1989:48). While the temple still exists, it is now occupied by a non-religious association.

There are three well-known mythological theme parks in Taiwan that prominently feature otherworldly imaginaries displayed in static and animatronic sculptures. The Palace of Southern Heaven in Zhanghua was opened in 1971. This privately owned building and its theme park was originally owned by a Mr. Chen,^{*404} who passed away in 1999 at the age of 86, and is now owned by his son who rarely visits. The Palace of Southern Heaven was constructed and opened with encouragement and cooperation from officials at a popular religious temple called the Prefecture that Represents Heaven, located in Madou. Officials at this temple created their own animatronic scenes of the afterlife in 1982. Administrators at both mythological theme parks were aided in the production process by spirit mediums called *tangki*.⁴⁰⁵ These intermediaries between theme park imagineers and the gods were queried on crucial questions about the production of representations of both paradise and purgatory. The final theme park in this study, the Pure Land Cave at the

⁴⁰⁴ This project, and the ethnographic research employed within it, has been approved by Cornell’s University Committee on Human Subjects. I have changed many of my contributors’ names, denoted by an asterisk, but I have chosen to use the real names of well-known locations and personalities. These locations and officials are already recognized throughout Taiwan.

⁴⁰⁵ This is the Taiwanese pronunciation of the Mandarin *jitong* (乩童), or divination lads.

Light of Buddha Mountain outside of Gaoxiong (高雄), was created by the monastery's founder, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, in 1972 after his visit to Disneyland.

In addition to stone grottos and artwork focused on the afterlife, the moral topographies located within these theme parks were culled from the body of popular Chinese mythology explored in my fifth chapter. These tales include: *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, *Journey to the West*, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, *Mulian Saves his Mother*, and the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. Theme park creators also referenced the texts included in my previous chapter, *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Though these locations feature a strong religious or moral thematic, their production was also influenced by secular amusement parks.⁴⁰⁶ The sculptural representation of Buddhist paradise at the Light of Buddha Mountain was constructed immediately after its leader visited Disneyland's "A Small World." The two Taiwanese theme parks featured in this study require a mandatory donation or the purchase of a child, student, or adult ticket while large revolving gates ensure that adolescents cannot sneak in through the exits. As participants walk through these imaginative environments, they are supervised on surveillance cameras by employees and each scene's animatronics are turned on by a complex system of motion sensors. Hydraulic floors give way as visitors cross the "Naihe Bridge" into hell and electronic ghosts frighten participants as they drop from the ceiling.

Yet amusement park or haunted house is not the most fitting nomenclature for these locations. Western-influenced haunted houses, recently introduced to Taiwan by

⁴⁰⁶ Conversely, conventional religious representations of the afterlife have also influenced amusement parks in East Asia. Aviad Raz (1999:44-45) explains in his study of Tokyo Disneyland, that managers converted Cinderella's Castle into a dungeon that houses popular Japanese ghosts and goblins, structured much like the traditional ghost-houses which have been a popular form of amusement for hundreds of years in Japan.

Hollywood-based entertainment companies,⁴⁰⁷ feature standard and culturally specific ghostly spectacles, including rotting remains on the motorized scooters so popular – and dangerous – in Taiwan today (Compass 2000). Though profiting from otherworldly themes similar to those found at the three locations featured in this study, amusing haunted houses lack the forceful religious didactics that make mythological theme parks influential. Mrs. Li,* a thirty-year employee at the Palace of Southern Heaven, enjoins, “This is certainly not an amusement park. It is a religious holy site (*zongjiao shengdi* 宗教聖地).” Religiously informed, these mythological theme parks feature an amalgam of popular Buddhist stories, *Journey to the West* and *Mulian Saves his Mother*, Daoist deities, Xuantian Shangdi (玄天上帝) and Fude Zhengshen (福德正神), and popular Confucian teachings, featured in scenes from well-known moral tales.⁴⁰⁸ Officials at the Palace of Southern Heaven, Prefecture that Represents Heaven, and Pure Land Cave also maintain popular religious shrines to local deities. Yet these shrines either attract a small percentage of visitors or are separate from the theme park venues.⁴⁰⁹ Though one frightened thirteen year-old participant visiting with his parents believed the Palace of Southern Heaven to be hell itself, I believe that the term mythological theme park better encompasses the complex origin and roles of these physical representations of the afterlife.

Representations of purgatory and tales of morality are housed in a three-story building at the Palace of Southern Heaven.⁴¹⁰ Large signs promising animatronics lead

⁴⁰⁷ Nana’s Haunted House, labeled Taizhong’s “first genuine haunted house” (Compass 2000), was opened for three months in 2000. Also opened in Taipei and Gaoxiong, the haunted house was, “A joint project between a local company and Hollywood-based Mirage Entertainment, which specializes in such ghoulish productions” (Compass 2000). There is also a restaurant in Taipei called “The Haunted House” which serves meals like “Ghost’s Head & Brains” and “Rotten Body Parts.”

⁴⁰⁸ See Robert Weller (1987) for a more detailed exegesis of this complex religious mixture that appears throughout Taiwan. For more on “popular Confucianism” see Clart (2003).

⁴⁰⁹ The popular religious shrines at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven and the Light of Buddha Mountain are some of the more highly trafficked pilgrimage sites in Taiwan. Yet popular religious rituals at these locations, including offerings, self-mortification, and divination, occur separately from the representations of the afterlife in the rear court.

⁴¹⁰ For a complete photographic reference see Appendix 9.

tourists off Zhanghua's Eight Trigram Mountain to this location, yet either the NT\$50⁴¹¹ admission fee or Mrs. Li's* rapacious roar for customers deters many potential guests. The first floor holds the ticket counter, the first scenes of hell (including the karmic mirror of retribution where each soul's sins are shown), and the bloody pond. If visitors decide to purchase an adult, student, or children's ticket, they are free to walk up to the second floor. The entrance to hell, a gaping demon's mouth, is located on the second floor of this privately owned building.⁴¹² After entering hell through the demon's mouth, visitors pass over the Naihe Bridge, supported by hydraulics which drop when weighted. This gives visitors the sensation that they are falling off the bridge and their screams can regularly be heard throughout the mythological theme park. The courts of hell line the second floor and visitors trip motion sensors that start each scene's animatronic display. The name of each court's judge is displayed above their desk and descriptive warnings can be found on placards located in each court. These descriptions read, "Cause: Girls who read worthless books. Effect: Receive the punishment of having your eyes poked out." Or, "Cause: Don't respect the virtue of unmarried women. Effect: Receive the bitter punishment of being steamed in a bamboo basket." The final scenes of hell feature Mother Meng and the wheel of reincarnation, where souls are sent to one of six stages of reincarnation: immortal; virtuous human; commoner; quadruped; fowl, reptile, or amphibian; or insect or fish.⁴¹³ Visitors then climb to the third and final floor, which once housed representations of paradise, replaced over ten years ago with the more entertaining and economically lucrative "Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts." This final section

⁴¹¹ About \$1.50USD.

⁴¹² Bakhtin explains of the image of a gaping mouth, "This is, of course, related to the lower stratum; it is the open gate leading downward into the bodily underworld. The gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, this most ancient symbol of death and destruction" (1968:325).

⁴¹³ A description of the wheel of reincarnation similar to the one depicted at Zhanghua and Madou can be found in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* (Yang 1978:103-104).

includes cannibalistic ghosts, Chinese vampires (*jiangshi* 僵尸), and scary or alluring scenes from *Journey to the West*⁴¹⁴ and *Mulan Saves his Mother*.

The Prefecture that Represents Heaven's animatronics of paradise and purgatory reside within a sculptural dragon 590-feet-long and are open to visitors for the mandatory "donation" of NT\$40.⁴¹⁵ While the representations of hell at Zhanghua and Madou share many similarities, the Prefecture that Represents Heaven includes eighteen separate purgatorial scenes, while the Palace of Southern Heaven has ten.⁴¹⁶ Also, the creators of the Prefecture that Represents Heaven strategically incorporated sculptures wearing modern clothing into their representations, while the Palace of Southern Heaven has not. While physical representations at both temples include features like the Bloody Pond, wheel of reincarnation, and Mother Meng, the Mirror of Retribution, in which the deceased is forced to watch all of their earthly sins, is portrayed at the theme park in Madou by actual photographs of a partially clothed couple, projected onto the Mirror from the ceiling. Also, the Prefecture that Represents Heaven features a vampire's cave, graveyard, depiction of a suicide,⁴¹⁷ and cave of female ghosts. The demons depicted as torturing the denizens of hell are painted green and blue at both mythological theme parks.⁴¹⁸ The entrance to heaven, which also requires a mandatory "donation," begins with a set of stairs that leads to the Gate of Southern Heaven, guarded by Monkey from *Journey to the West*. The first scene of heaven depicts gods and immortals meeting with the Jade Emperor in their attempt to

⁴¹⁴ The animatronic scenes from *Journey to the West* which appear in the Palace of Southern Heaven can be found in chapters seventy-two and seventy-three and include Sanzang's capture by the spider and Zhu Bajie's temptation.

⁴¹⁵ This is about \$1.20USD. For a complete photographic reference see Appendix 10.

⁴¹⁶ There are ten courts of hell and eighteen levels, allowing for each type of representation.

⁴¹⁷ The *Precious Records* also mentions a "City of Suicides" located in hell (Clarke 1893:262).

⁴¹⁸ These green and blue demons can be found in hell scrolls produced in the 13th century (Ledderose 2000:165) and be given this color skin to represent the manner in which they died. Duyvendak (1952:279) explains that he has seen a similar group of blue and green demons called "poverty ghosts" (*qionggui* 窮鬼), given a greenish or bluish hue because they died of starvation.

lead humans towards righteousness. The second scene of heaven features the Hall of the Examination and Division of Good and Evil, where the deeds of mortals are recorded, and the next scene shows the selection of virtuous men and women for heaven's various festivities. The fourth scene of heaven is a location where gods and immortals come to relax and drink tea and the following scene depicts the location where immortal maidens come to dance. The sixth scene of heaven is a pavilion where gods and immortals watch the immortal women and drink tea and the next is a forest where immortals play music. The eighth scene is the location where gods and immortals play chess and next scene depicts a popular myth called *The Cowherd and the Weaver*.⁴¹⁹ The tenth and final scene of heaven features the disciples of Buddha listening intently to his teachings. These scenes each feature animatronic figures activated by motion sensors.

The Pure Land Cave, located at the Light of Buddha Mountain, is the only mythological theme park where a donation is encouraged but not mandatory.⁴²⁰ The first large room in the Pure Land Cave features Buddha on both sides, spreading his arms to humans on one side and animals on the other. As stated earlier, this representation of Buddhist paradise was created in 1972 after the Venerable Master Hsing Yun visited Disneyland's "Small World" exhibit. If visitors look closely they can see Disney characters like Mickey Mouse and Goofy on the back of children's t-shirts in this first room. Two large guardian deities flank the doorway to the next hall. In this hall the Buddha is depicted delivering the Amitabha sutra to an assembly of 1250 monks at the Jeta Grove in Śrāvastī. Famous bodhisattvas like Maitreya and Manjusri and arhats like Sariputra and Maudgalyayana are prominently displayed. The Pure Land Cave continues to the left through a hallway called the Cave of Nine

⁴¹⁹ See Loewe (1979:118) for more on this popular myth.

⁴²⁰ For a complete photographic reference see Appendix 11.

Grades. This hallway features visual and textual descriptions of the nine different levels of rebirth and spiritual attainment. The final section of the Pure Land Cave serves as a model of Amitābha's Land of Supreme Bliss. This depiction of the Pure Land includes waterfalls, lotus ponds, immortal women, birds that speak the dharma, and sculptural representations of the Buddha. A tour of the Pure Land Cave at the Light of Buddha Mountain ends with a gift shop full of Buddha-related merchandise.

Magicians: Mythological Theme Park Creators and Employees

The creators and employees at Taiwan's three mythological theme parks are all middle-aged or older. While each theme park pays a small, permanent staff to run and maintain these locations, many volunteers from the local neighborhood assist for free. These volunteers, often retirees, teachers, or homemakers, offer their time in an attempt to accumulate personal merit and encourage moral action among visitors. Many theme park employees believe it was fate which brought them to their current positions. Mrs. Li,* an employee at the Palace of Southern Heaven who has worked since its opening more than thirty years ago stated, "I started here because of fate. We employees are all over 60 years old and have been working here for over 30 years. Mr. Zhang* has been working here that long, as has Mr. Liu.* We have four regular employees that receive a salary and lots of people that come from the neighborhood to help. These volunteers receive no salary. They are often people from this neighborhood, just like me."

The first mythological theme park in Taiwan, the Palace of Southern Heaven in Zhanghua, was created with the help of officials from Madou's Prefecture that Represents Heaven and local spirit mediums. Mrs. Li explains that the theme park's owner "used a *tangki* who went into trance and told him that he should include sculptures of hell in this temple. The gods descended and told him, through the *tangki*, how to build it so that it would deliver the maximum societal benefit." As previously

mentioned, mythological theme parks were also patterned after historical precedents, hell scrolls, and textual accounts of the afterlife. As the peddlers – not creators – of these otherworldly representations, mythological theme park officials, employees, and volunteers, seem to fulfill a social role similar to what Bourdieu (1984) has called “cultural intermediaries.” These cultural intermediaries, Keith Negus explains, are “those workers who come *in-between* creative artists and consumers (or, more generally, production and consumption)” (2002:503).⁴²¹

Cultural intermediaries at mythological theme parks consistently expressed one explicit goal: their intent to influence visitors to become, or remain, moral citizens. Mrs. Huang,* a local middle school teacher and volunteer at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven, stated, “The reason that I volunteer my time is to persuade children and adolescents to do good deeds while avoiding evil.” Mrs. Li* emphatically explained that the creator of the Palace of Southern Heaven did not open that mythological theme park to make money:

First and foremost, he wanted to teach people to do good deeds. When this location initially opened we used to let people come in for free without buying tickets for admission. It has only been within the last 10 years or so that we have been forced to charge people to enter. We have been open for more than 30 years, so it has not been long that we have had to charge people to enter. This is because the cost of running this location is increasing, due to our rising electric bill and other expenses. We also have to fix the animatronic machines and keep this place running so we now have to accept admissions tickets but we used to not charge people to enter.

These attempts to encourage virtuous action through the display of traditional Chinese mores occurred throughout Taiwan during this period of cultural crisis, impelled by

⁴²¹ Negus (2002:509) also points out that cultural intermediaries, and the use of that term as heuristic, often reproduces the distance between production and consumption, rather than connecting it. While Negus’s study is focused on the British music industry, his description of entry into life as a cultural intermediary, “usually via networks of connections, shared values and common life experiences,” (2002:511) and explanation of a cultural intermediary’s role, in which these workers use “their access to the cultural industries to maintain a series of rather more traditional and enduring boundaries, social divisions and hierarchies,” (2002:513) mirrors what I observed among staff at Taiwan’s mythological theme parks.

industrialization and Westernization in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.⁴²² Taiwan's ruling political party, the KMT (*Guoming dang* 國民黨), initiated the "Cultural Resistance Movement" in 1966, a movement comprised of promoting national solidarity and introducing traditional cultural values through socializing practices (Tsai 2004:51).⁴²³ Tsai (2004:54) explains that in 1987, the second president of Taiwan's Mediums' Association, Dr. Lai Zongxian (賴宗賢), initiated a "Moral Maintenance Movement" which was inspired by divine revelation. Tsai explains, "This movement was inspired by a sense of the social disorder and moral degradation of contemporary society. The latter was diagnosed as being due to the 'total transplantation of Western culture and the ignorance of our traditional moral culture'" (2004:54). In addition to politically and textually based movements, popular temples associated with the God of the Eastern Peak, a precursor to modern mythological theme parks, also historically flourished during periods of crisis (Eberhard 1967:50).

Cultural and moral influence is attempted by imagineers at these mythological theme parks through the display of didactic performance and the manipulation of memories. The gap between rule and application, code and execution is most effectively bridged, according to Bourdieu (1977) and Connerton (1989), by habit memory or bodily practice. The raw somatic punishment⁴²⁴ performed at these locations is meant to encourage virtuous action by associating the consequences and rewards of the afterlife with bodily memory. Pain inflicted to sensitive areas such as the eyes – linked by Freud (2003) to a fear of castration – is overtly apparent in representations of purgatory and serves to underscore the risk of these unsocialized

⁴²² These attempts occurred during this period in China as well (and, of course, in both Taiwan and China since before the introduction of Western and industrial culture). For more on the updated moral agenda in China see Borge (1991).

⁴²³ This and later movements mirrored the "New Life Movement" proposed by Chiang Kai-shek in 1934 (Tsai 2004:54). In 1934, Chiang proposed that the four virtues of politeness (*li* 禮), righteousness (*yi* 義), integrity (*lian* 廉), and self-respect (*chi* 恥) were essential in guiding people's lives.

⁴²⁴ Hell scrolls are famous for their portrayal of similar acts of somatic violence (see LaFleur 1989).

desires to the socialized subject. As Freud has stipulated, “There are countless civilized people that would shrink from murder or incest but who do not deny themselves the satisfaction of their avarice, their aggressive urges or their sexual lusts, and who do not hesitate to injure other people by lies, fraud, and calumny, so long as they can remain unpunished for it” (1961:12). Enforcement of private and difficult-to-enforce infractions is facilitated through the induced recollection of forgotten or repressed desires and the gruesome depiction of their consequences. In an attempt to circumvent Mother Meng’s forced forgetting and encourage moral action, imagineers from both mythological theme parks have created compelling environments, as literature from Madou explains, “with animatronics and realistic sound effects to induce a corporeal and emotional experience for modern people” (Madou).⁴²⁵

Theme park officials and employees constantly lament “People’s hearts are not as they once were” (人心不古) and generally believe that the contemporary state and family has failed in its role as moral enforcer. Officials from both Zhanghua and Madou express similar social goals and maintain that their objective in opening and maintaining these mythological theme parks is not economic profit or elevated social status,⁴²⁶ but to reinforce the consequences of evil actions while encouraging citizens to commit virtuous deeds. A brochure from the theme park in Madou submits:

A religious spirit is the stronghold of society’s stability and assists the government in safeguarding public order and security...After this temple was designated as a religious memorial and tourist site it cooperated with the government in developing a tourist enterprise which sought to implement a revival of Chinese culture. Collecting donations from countries in East and Southeast Asia, our temple raised enough money to build the eighteen-storied hell beneath the large dragon in the rear court. This location will be used to startle people to the realization that they cannot commit evil actions or bully

⁴²⁵ Interestingly, the sound effects in heaven feature narration in Mandarin Chinese while those in hell consist of a narration in the local dialect, Taiwanese.

⁴²⁶ Literature from Madou also prominently features photographs of visiting Taiwanese political leaders, including the current president, Chen Shui-bian, posed with officials from the Prefecture that Represents Heaven.

and oppress the kind-hearted. This is done through the depiction of the bitter punishments that people will receive in hell. These scenes will cause those who witness them to abandon evil and pursue virtue. (Madou N.d.)

The enforcement of these startling realizations, initiated by theme parks' self-deputized agents of socialization, is sustained by neighborhood volunteers like Mrs. Chen, an English teacher at a Zhanghua junior high school. When Mrs. Chen's students illegally drove scooters to a date with classmates at the Palace of Southern Heaven, she pulled them aside for a stern lecture after allowing them to view the consequences of their evil ways in representations of purgatorial punishment. This younger and boisterous crowd is cause for concern at both theme parks, as the inculcation of filial sentiments is perceived as an increasingly difficult task.

Visitors were once so numerous at both mythological theme parks that the popular idiom, "People mountain, people sea (*renshan renhai* 人山人海)" was often invoked by employees describing these parks' golden days. An elated Mrs. Li* explained that the Palace of Southern Heaven was once open until ten o'clock every night and received so many donations that it was never forced to charge its many guests. As attendance rates dropped at Zhanghua and entrance fees were introduced, the temple replaced its representation of heaven with a "ghost house" to attract a younger, paying crowd. This replacement of heaven, a sore point for employees, was assuaged by the opportunity to influence this adolescent crowd through the didactics of bodily punishment.

The manipulation of memories, another method of collective influence that allows theme park imagineers to maintain the societal *status quo*, is achieved through the creation of a seductive countermemory. Ann Burlein (1999) expropriates the term countermemory, first employed by Michel Foucault (1977), to explain the processes by which memories are reshaped and appropriated to serve hegemonic – as well as peripheral – social and religious causes. Mythological theme parks and their officials

present a carefully constructed countermemory which attempts to reassign harsh recollections of socialization, such as familial and educational violence, as necessary acts of compassion. I assert that the punishments of hell, modeled on the imperial bureaucracy (Orzech 1994), no longer influence participants as a vivid metaphor for the violent Chinese magistrate (*yamen*) system. As a decreasing number of Taiwanese today have personal experience with this antiquated mode of government, the powerful displays of violence at these mythological theme parks, where unfilial children are punished just as harshly as vicious murderers, now references the socializing punishments – or insults to narcissism – endured at home and at school. Mr. Zhang, an official at the Prefecture that Represents Heaven reiterates, “We firmly believe the saying ‘Education today is not sufficient’ (*jiaoyu bugou* 教育不夠). Families are rarely together which has caused children to become disobedient.”

The representations of heaven and hell created and maintained by theme park imagineers are designed to replace the memories of harsh discipline with the counter memories of parents and teachers who compassionately cared only for their societal success and well-being in the afterlife. The equivalence in hell of all sin, significant and minor, misappropriates memories of abuse for unintentional, learning mistakes. In these representations of purgatory, the minor infractions of gossip, disrespect of in-laws, reading of worthless books, or living easy lives are portrayed as warranting similar punishment as significant moral or social indiscretions. Theme park employees attempt to introduce and ensure the success of these violent counter memories through a process of misrecognition in which this punishment is divinely administered, and thus always warranted. Zhanghua’s Mrs. Li* concurs, “Punishment is administered according to the ‘wisdom of the gods’ (*shenming zhishi* 神明知識).” Unfortunately, depictions of hell employed as representation of divine will now serve to hide the true mechanisms of often harsher than necessary socializing

violence by placing the unassailable “guilt of victimage onto the victims” (Orzech 1994:124).

The attempt by mythological theme park creators and staff to influence social behavior is facilitated, in part, by the use of modern technology. As previously mentioned, early mythological theme parks like Beijing’s Temple of the Eastern Peak began utilizing wire and pulley systems causing their hellish figures to move. Contemporary theme parks have continued those technological additions with motion sensors, electronic animatronics, hydraulic bridges, and scary strobe lights.⁴²⁷ These modern updates also include the addition of figures in scenes of heaven and hell wearing contemporary dress, strategically placed to encourage visitors’ self-identification.⁴²⁸ Yet despite the introduction of technology, the moral topography depicted at these mythological theme parks is extremely traditional. Even early spirit-written texts, like the *Precious Book of the Jade Regulations* (Yulü baojuan 玉律寶卷) composed in Shanxi in 1622, feature an afterlife which has been updated to fit with its author’s sense of that time’s ethos. While the *Jade Regulations* features a “Bloody Pond” in hell, originally reserved only for women who died in the “polluting” act of childbirth, it has been updated to include both men and women (Jordan and Overmyer 1986:47). This egalitarian proposal stands in sharp contrast to the traditional, androcentric representations of hell at contemporary mythological theme parks, which still display a pre-Ming moral code.

While these traditional anachronisms are included as a calculated attempt to align mythological theme parks with powerful political and religious imagery from the

⁴²⁷ Jordan Paper explains that this technological trend is also popular at religious temples throughout Taiwan which “may utilize the latest construction techniques or be simple storefront temples; almost all will contain computers, photocopiers, fax machines, etc.” (1996:106).

⁴²⁸ An analogous attempt occurred much earlier at the stone grottos of Baodingshan. Kucera explains of these sculptures, “Hell is replete with gendered anonymous people, thereby making it all-inclusive” (2005:4).

past, creators and staff have struck an uneasy balance between tradition and entertainment. David Johnson, in discussion of dramatic performances based on the Mulian story, has unfortunately proposed, “The distinction between entertainment and religion that comes naturally to us did not seem that obvious to most Chinese” (1995:91). Contrary to lingering ethnocentric misconceptions, Chinese and Taiwanese citizens can capably distinguish or blur the lines between entertainment and religion as well as we Westerners. This struggle between entertainment and religion has been recorded among authors of spirit-travelogues, worried that their narrative morality books might “mislead readers into regarding them as entertaining fiction” (Clart 1996:339). Just like these morality book authors, who incorporated the new vernacular language into their accounts of the afterlife while espousing traditional mores, contemporary mythological theme park creators have attempted to utilize technology while simultaneously preaching against its ills.

Audience: Mythological Theme Park Visitors

While spending two summers and most of an academic year at Taiwan’s mythological theme parks, I dutifully recorded how many – and what type – of visitors tour these locations. Some holidays, I recorded over 100 visitors to these theme parks and there was a steady average of 20 guests per location on a weekday. The representations of hell at the Palace of Southern Heaven and the Prefecture that Represents Heaven were both toured predominately by children and adolescents. In an attempt to discourage disobedient behavior, elementary school children were once taken to tour the horrific courts of hell at Zhanghua and Madou on school fieldtrips. While these school fieldtrips have recently been halted due to fiscal cutbacks, they remain memorable journeys for their many participants and young children are still frequently taken by parents hoping to make a lasting impression.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁹ As Goodrich (1981:3) states, many children in early twentieth century Beijing were taken to the

Adolescents, who arrange to meet at these locations with classmates, would often not enter the horrific courts of hell without an adult companion; frequently my role as participant observer. Groups of classmates often spent time working up the courage to enter these dark representations of hell, and females sometimes elected to wait outside. Many of these adolescent, and even college-aged boys, loudly posturing for their female classmates at the theme park's entrance, also required a chaperone through the darker rooms, such as the Palace of Southern Heaven's Ghost House. Tightly clinging to my camera bag, a group of five or six male students would whimper their way into the vivid visual representations of hell.

Adults infrequently visit representations of hell at Zhanghua and Madou. When they do tour these animatronic depictions it is often to accompany their children or return to view what was once so scary. In his observation of contemporary ritual theater featuring scenes of hell in Guangxi, David Holm states, "The reaction most often visible in contemporary peasant audiences to the masked dancers are terror and boredom: terror on the part of small children, and boredom on the part of everybody else" (1993:267). While this boredom is often the most identifiable emotion among adults accompanying their children, interviews with visitors who have returned as an adult to again view hell often incredulously reveal their shock that such an arbitrary and obviously fabricated representation exerted so much influence on them when young.

Why, if representations of the afterlife are *collective* fantasies, would individual participants contribute to and reproduce the socializing power and oppressive hierarchies that these representations introduce and the sublimation of desire that they mandate? Godelier is similarly puzzled as to why people would accept

Temple of the Eastern Peak for this same reason. Similarly, Orzech reveals that at funerals and the seventh lunar month's Ghost Festival it is not uncommon "to see mothers instructing children while examining the depictions of hell" (1994:116).

and even seek out social enslavement asking incredulously, “To what extent are [people] convinced that it is necessary to exclude, repress, metamorphose, sublimate the facts for the supreme good of all, and that the restriction of access to power (and/or wealth) to only one part of society is in the divine, supernatural order of things?” (1999:178). The imaginary realms of the afterlife portrayed at mythological theme parks provide three interrelated incentives to their individual participants: thrillingly horrific and soothingly superlative entertainment, the opportunity to forget collective impositions and entertain narcissistic fantasies by assuming the role of hellish torturer or heavenly immortal, and a space to remember the frustrating prohibitions that stand in the way of uninhibited enjoyment, thus maintaining tension between the drives.

To attract visitors, the animatronic didactics at these mythological theme parks adhere to a strong thematic and are entertaining (Wong and Cheung 1999). The principal method of entertainment in representations of paradise is to depict visitors’ desires and depict what they fear in representations of hell. When asked which hellish character was most frightening, Mrs. Wen,* an employee at Madou, replied, “If you haven’t committed sins none of them are scary. If you have committed sins then all of them are scary. ‘If you don’t commit evil deeds, you don’t need to fear ghosts knocking at your door,’ (*Buzuo kui xinshi, bu pa gui chao men* 不做虧心事, 不怕鬼敲門).” As I slowly inched through depictions of hell, the male college students grasping tightly to my camera bag began to relax and laugh when demons administered their gruesome punishments. While terrified children are often brought to these locations for moral instruction, Mrs. Li* explains, “Many college students also come during holidays. They just walk around laughing at everything they see and have a good time.”

Part of this “good time” comes from conquering one’s fears and realizing that the antiquated representations of heaven and hell at mythological theme parks are not

nearly as frightening as visitors may have originally imagined. Local temples are often popularly imagined as truly frightening locations. They are still thought to have some preternatural awareness regarding who is visiting, represented by haunting pronouncements like “So you have arrived” (*Er lai le* 爾來了) written in wooden plaques above temple entrances. Texts like the *Precious Records* feature tales of punishment meted out by the physical representations of the temple gods themselves. One of these stories explains that a hot-headed Mrs. Li attacked her neighbor, Mrs. Wu, as she was praying to the marshal deity Guan Di. The *Precious Records* states, “The mud idol arose and with his sword killed her. The blood dripped from his sword and he sat down” (Clarke 1893:266).⁴³⁰ Despite being frightening locations, there is also a string of historical references to protagonists who have challenged their fears associated with the supernatural found at popular religious temples and come away victors. Scenes of immortals and mortals playing games of chess can be found depicted in Han tomb bas reliefs (Seidel 1982:95). Seidel reveals that some evidence has been uncovered which indicates that “In Han and earlier times, ambitious human beings wished that they could play *po* games with deities, hoping to obtain magic powers by winning over them” (1982:95). How are contemporary visitors rewarded by challenging their fears or preconceived desires?

The laughter heard at these mythological theme parks signifies that entertained visitors feel two primary emotions: relief and acceptance. The artificial, contrived, and often decrepit images of hellish torturers and heavenly immortals quickly evoke

⁴³⁰ The *Precious Records* also includes the tale of Mr. Chang, a graduate of the third degree who often accused respectable households of adultery, subsequently serving as legal council and making substantial sums of money. The *Precious Records* explains, “On the seventh of the seventh moon, A.D. 1692, he went into the temple of the God of Hades to burn incense. Whilst kneeling before the idol, he was so severely beaten that he spat blood. Upon his arrival at home he told his friends that the god had beaten him. He fell sick and died within a few days” (Clarke 1893:301).

laughter from many visitors.⁴³¹ While this laughter is initially nervous, Bakhtin proposes that “terror is conquered by laughter” (1968:336), and visitors are soon laughing in relief. This relief, whether because images are not as terrifying as imagined or clearly culturally contrived, also carries with it a sense of acceptance. This acceptance, also vocalized in visitors’ laughter, is an acceptance that no matter how arbitrary the representations of the afterlife at mythological theme parks may be, each individual will eventually face death. This laughter of acceptance, what Bakhtin has termed “medieval laughter” (1994:210), occurs when an individual realizes that death cannot decay the ancestral body of society, continually renewed in the next generation. Bakhtin explains, “The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement” (1968:341). These images of social renewal are most poignant in representations of hell, which depict disembodied human limbs strewn across mountains of knives.⁴³²

For many visitors to mythological theme parks, participation and its result is limited to entertainment: exhilaration, laughter, and relief. In the search for why individuals with nothing to gain in maintaining an oppressive hierarchy often willingly create and participate in representations of the afterlife which repress desires, some scholars have proposed that participants in these spaces of fantasy have access to agency in assuming the role of punisher. Purgatory then becomes the imaginary location where we can entertain the ambivalent feelings towards our family members,

⁴³¹ Eberhard similarly explains that in *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld*, visitors focus on the hells that they find most interesting and often “laugh when they see the most terrible tortures because the convulsions of the sinners seem funny to them” (1967:29). Kucera also states, “Modern sculptural renditions are rare, and those that exist tend to elicit more laughter than fear” (2005:17).

⁴³² Bakhtin also discusses this “grotesque body” which “are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image” (1968:322).

specifically our parents as agents of socialization (Freud 1961; Jordan 2004). The opportunity to administer this “righteous” punishment is often viewed as reward for delaying the immediate gratification of a sin and accepting unmitigated social integration. As Freud explains, “Not infrequently the punishment gives the executors themselves an opportunity to commit the same sacrilegious act by justifying it as expiation” (1946:94). Other visitors to these theme parks may be able to satiate individualistic desires as they forget collective impositions and identify more strongly with the omnipotent immortals in heaven and the powerful judges in hell.

Because the sins punished in purgatory range from appalling murder to frivolous gossip, it is conceivable that most visitors to these theme parks will have committed at least one of the sins included. Yet these temples allow righteous participants the opportunity to bypass the obligatory stay in purgatory, previously the initial afterlife destination for all deceased in Taiwan (Cohen 1988). As literature from Madou explains, “We hope that people’s hearts are transformed and they implement virtuous ideas in creating a peaceful, joyful, and prosperous society. If all turn towards virtue they will rise to heaven and their souls will avoid being imprisoned in hell.” While a participant tours these scenes of the afterlife, they stand in a space of ambivalence where, according to this new doctrine of salvation, they will not be punished for past moral indiscretions. What happens when visitors voyeuristically gaze at the tortures of hell and no longer see themselves punished? My research reveals that self-identification may occur unexpectedly for some visitors whose desires more closely correspond with the immortals in these scenes than the mortals, torturers than tortured. Participants’ desires are motivated by the opportunity to participate in these egocentric imaginaries whilst being assured that the prohibitions in purgatory will maintain their compulsive urges.

While it may seem a stretch to propose that some visitors to mythological theme parks assume the role of heavenly immortal or hellish torturer – and even more improbable to suggest that they imagine punishing their own family members – I believe that this process occurs and can be explicated. Before I outline this process, I would like to begin by stating that it often occurs unconsciously (and, if it is conscious, it is understandable that visitors are recalcitrant to share their feelings with an anthropologist they just met). Only twice did I have interlocutors admit to banishing any of their acquaintances to hell, and this banished group never included family members.⁴³³ While deep-rooted feelings of filial piety probably block sublimated sentiments of acrimony and aggression towards the socializing agents in one's own family, this does not mean that they do not exist.⁴³⁴

Freud, who famously investigated psychological sublimation, reveals that the German phrase “*ein unheimliches haus*” or “an uncanny house” is often translated into English as “a haunted house” (Freud 2003:148). Freud (2003) employs the term “uncanny” to denote an unexpected return of urges repressed and forgotten. This feeling of the uncanny, which originates for Freud (2003:140) as an infantile castration complex, can also be viewed as the revelation that the unified subject is always at risk from the recollection of narcissistic impulses. I submit that mythological theme parks, with their scenes of torture and dismembered body parts, can prompt these feelings of the uncanny, moments in which desires and fantasies not quite socialized are recalled, and that mythological theme parks can operate in the same way that toys and play

⁴³³ Goodrich ran into a similar sentiment when conducting fieldwork near Beijing's Temple of the Eastern Peak. While interviewing participants, “One young friend added that when she got very angry with any one she consigned him or her to a hell worse than the *Shih-pa Ti-yü*” (Goodrich 1981:76).

⁴³⁴ Of Chinese conceptions of hell Ahern states, “In spite of the detail of these tortures, most people insisted that none of their ancestors would suffer them. Although they admit that everyone has committed some wrong or other, they assert that the performance of certain rites on the eve of the funeral will cancel out all misdemeanors and ‘make it as though they had never been committed’” (1973:221).

worked for Melanie Klein (1986) and her psychoanalysis of children, as stages on which individuals can act out or imagine psychological desires and anxieties.⁴³⁵

If, as I propose, visitors feel this sense of the uncanny, urges repressed and forgotten arise, and some sate these egocentric impulses by identifying not with the tortured in each hellish scene but the torturers, why imagine torturing family members? First and foremost, family members – particularly parents – are often the harshest agents of socialization. In her investigation of ancestral interference in Taiwan, Ahern explains that there are two predominant theories in the attribution of benevolence or malevolence to one's ancestors. The first is that childhood experiences of socialization cause the attribution of aggression to ancestors and the second, as Ahern describes, occurs when "one person inherits property and jural authority from another, he has an ambivalent attitude toward his benefactor's death, being at once happy because he has come into his inheritance and sad because of the death of the loved one. In consequence, the heir feels guilty; he senses that his desire to inherit makes him in some way responsible for the death that must precede his inheritance" (1973:191). This process of attributing internal emotions to external relations, labeled "projective identification" by W.R. Bion (1957), leads to the feeling that one's deceased ancestors are malevolently planning an individual's demise, consequently validating an individual's ill-will towards those family members who are surely plotting against them.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ Klein explains that her first patient was a five-year-old boy who she referred to as "Fritz." Klein states, "The treatment was carried out in the child's home with his own toys. This analysis was the beginning of the psycho-analytic play technique, because from the start the child expressed his phantasies and anxieties mainly in play, and I consistently interpreted its meaning to him, with the result that additional material came up in his play" (1986:37).

⁴³⁶ As Segal explains of this process, "The projection and fragmentation of one's own perceptual apparatus leads not only to a misperception of the object, but also to the mutilation of one's own perceptual apparatus. I would add to this that in such situations what is also projected is the cognitive capacity itself and the judgmental capacity, so that the objects are experienced as all-knowing and judgmental – the bad objects created often have a powerful superego quality" (1994:396-397).

There are also many historical references to meeting family members in hell. Ahern states that in journeys to the underworld, “By far the most frequently met relatives are the parents” (1973:235). One famous textual example is Emperor Taizong, one of the characters in *Journey to the West*, and his memorable trip to hell. While touring the underworld Emperor Taizong endures an unfortunate meeting with his father and brother who, “grabbed and hit him, demanding their lives back; and as Taizong could not avoid them they held him fast until Judge Cui ordered a blue-faced devil with terrible fangs to drive them away” (Wu 1993:242). There are also historical precedents for the visitors to hell assuming the role of punisher. Thompson explains that in the second century Masters Designated by the Three Heaven Cult, punishment in the afterlife became a greater concern where, “The as-yet unsaved souls of the dead have become demons under the command of ‘judges and custodians,’ and rather than undergoing punishment themselves, they become instruments through which to administer punishment to living sinners” (1989:38).⁴³⁷ Dore (Vol. 1 1966:151-152) explains that during the ritual entitled “Passing over the Immortal Bridge” (*guo xianchao* 過仙橋), in which the soul of the recently deceased is thought to pass over a treacherous bridge on the journey to their next existence, a filial descendant must pay a proscribed amount to Buddhist monks dressed like the demons of hell to guarantee the safe passage of a parent or loved one. Yet does the assumption of the role of demonic torturer alleviate or exacerbate the violent tendencies of these monks or contemporary visitors to mythological theme parks?

Finally, mythological theme parks serve as spaces where visitors are prompted to remember the frustrating prohibitions that stand in the way of uninhibited enjoyment, thus maintaining tension between the drives. Surprisingly, the maintenance

⁴³⁷ This supernatural phenomenon is actually based on real life. Kucera (2005:5) explains that there was a historical Chinese penal policy where scarred criminals would often, upon their release, become jailers.

of these collective prohibitions, one of the afterlife's central functions, is more crucial to the individual's well-being than their imagined removal. Representations of the afterlife are successful in contemporary society not because they have afforded some of their participants the opportunity to imagine punishing their parents or other agents of socialization, but because they serve to alleviate the fear that these prohibitions will be taken away. This is evidenced as when freedom for individuals increases, new and stricter guidelines are often self-imposed. As Adrian Johnston (2005:244) discerns, both Freud (1961) and Marx (1978) mistakenly cling to utopian notions, much like the fantasy realm of the afterlife, of either a pre-libidinal paradise or a post-capitalist horizon. A move beyond these utopian visions is necessary to determine why individuals would willingly submit themselves to the yoke of societal oppression. Johnston, in the anti-utopian turn of contemporary psychoanalysis, purports that due to the dual nature of the drive (*trieb*)⁴³⁸ individuals have never had and will never attain occupancy within a narcissistic utopia. Johnston explains that the drive is split between the axis of iteration (source-pressure) and the axis of alteration (aim-object) (2005:149) and it is in this split that desires can never be realized. Johnston proposes that the axis of iteration, with its real and constant demands, can never obtain satisfaction because, "the representational components of the axis of alteration are subject to modification by temporal factors, a pure, undiluted repetition of the initial

⁴³⁸ Johnston builds this anti-utopian foundation by employing Freud's (1915) earlier conception of *trieb*, which locates the drive somewhere in between psyche and soma. This allows Johnston (2005, 296) to propose that Freud, in his development of the Oedipus complex, missed an even earlier form of subjugation, the somatic demands of an infant's drives. While most socio-cultural anthropologists would be hard-pressed to accept that the internal conflict within the drive occurs only as a type of objective and universal bodily conundrum, this theory can be usefully applied if we concede that the drive exists somewhere in between the biological and social. Without resorting to a sort of biological determinism or reverting to the Freudo-Marxian fallacies of a pre-libidinal or pre-capitalist society, we can also maintain that it is only after the Oedipus complex – when the social subject has accepted the rule of law – that these fantasies of full *jouissance*, which are culturally not biologically constructed, need to be maintained. In this formulation, the only real individual enjoyment that one can attain from representations of the afterlife is the delay of the pleasure principle through the invocation of the reality principle.

satisfaction sought by the axis of iteration is, strictly speaking, impossible” (2005:151). Thus Lacan’s formulation, *La jouissance n’existe pas* (Johnston 2005: xxix).

The afterlife serves its primary function for the individual at this juncture by maintaining tension between the axis of iteration and alteration through the ontogenic and therapeutic imaginary that full *jouissance* exists and is eminently attainable, what I would term a fantasy of frustration. The opportunity to assume the role of just punisher or divine immortal in collectively created representations of the afterlife serve as the carrot on a stick which motivates individuals endlessly searching for an uninhibited *jouissance*. Johnston explains that this pure enjoyment is delayed when the reality principle – the rule of father or law of society – is “employed as a scapegoat for the dissatisfaction of the drives” (2005, 298). Johnston explains:

If ‘external’ constraints are a residual by-product of the inherent antagonism within all drives, then some form of Freudian ‘civilization,’ as a prohibitory *Umwelt* in whatever particular forms, will always be necessary so as to sustain the fantasy of full satisfaction, regardless of whether this fantasy is of a Freudian past that is always-already lost or of a Marxist future endlessly *à venir*. [2005:254]

In a contemporary civilization that rarely punishes – and often rewards – its citizens for overindulgence, notions of purgatory provide the ideal reminder of collective impositions as frustrator and delayer of the drives. These individual prohibitions are a necessary addition to individual fantasy because as Johnston explains, “If one allowed oneself to follow completely the demands of the drive-source, the results would be devastatingly traumatic,” (2005:298) that is, the collapse of the individual being. Thus fantasies of paradisiacal autonomy can only be maintained in imaginaries with corresponding notions of purgatorial prohibitions.

Despite the naïve hope by officials at Madou that the obligatory stay in purgatory can be avoided, the continued threat of hell and its prohibitions is necessary

because it serves as the scapegoat of the ever-unsuccessful drive. While allowing some participants the imaginary space needed to forget, if just briefly, about collective impositions, these representations of the afterlife serve their primary, individual function by forcing their participants to remember the reality principle or “prohibitory *Umwelt*,” invoked as mnemonic at moments when complete satisfaction should be present but fails to materialize, *i.e.* “I would have obtained complete satisfaction in this way if it were not forbidden.” This manufactured tension between the drives can often be glimpsed when desires long thought repressed re-emerge and individuals glimpse that it is they who are serving as the gaolers of their own desires.

While the literature from Madou’s theme park is often overly optimistic, they are correct in their assertion that attendance at these locations “will ensure the existence of many generations of Chinese society” (Madou N.d.). Chenivresse states that the mythological theme park in Fengdu, China, “Is not only a circuit joining the world of the living and the netherworld, but also a ‘discursive place’ set up against that which is ‘not said,’ where people come to express the incommunicable – the traumatic gulf between oneself and the world” (1998:287). While serving as entertainment, projective fantasy, and space to maintain tension between the drives, visitors to mythological theme parks are provided the space to act out their individualistic fantasies while acknowledging the necessity of collectivities.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The first part of my dissertation contains a theoretical investigation of religious conceptions of the afterlife. I began with a brief examination of sociocultural anthropology while accommodating both practice theory and psychoanalysis. After this theoretical foray, I explored anthropological studies of religion in an attempt to situate my own project within the rubrics of postcolonialism and secular humanism. While many contemporary studies of religion focus on either its benefit or detriment, I am convinced that the creation of – and participation in – contemporary conceptions of the afterlife can be both beneficial and harmful. My second chapter, built on this theoretical foundation, focused on formulations of the afterlife. I began with a brief investigation of anthropological examinations of these ethereal imaginaries. While anthropologists have generally focused on the collective repercussions of participation in formulations of the afterlife, I also included an inquiry into individual interests and desires.

My second section, which features a focally framed history of conceptions of the Chinese afterlife, provided a critical analysis of the extant historiography while highlighting, and attempting to avoid, enduring ethnocentricities. I attempted to avoid these major misconceptions – the notion that Chinese and Taiwanese citizens are somehow uniquely predisposed to create or participate in these otherworldly imaginaries, that they are at a religious or cultural disadvantage in creating conceptions of the afterlife, and that these representations are only meditative tools which are not considered to be ontologically real by collectives or individuals – while providing a critical history of Chinese formulations of the afterlife. This investigation was also focused on narratives of heaven and hell in popular literature in an attempt to provide a basic historical outline to build upon in my third section.

The final section of my dissertation is focused on contemporary conceptions of the afterlife in Taiwan in both spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks. *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, and mythological theme parks reflect congregants' collective concerns towards phenomena such as social change and outline an afterlife which allows them to define these societal ills. These contemporary representations of the afterlife also attempt to provide both textual and physical forums in which participants can address individual desires. I began my dissertation with the promise to investigate three key research questions concerning contemporary conceptions of the afterlife in Taiwan. These research questions are: the struggle between individual desire and collective concerns, the applicability and adaptability of traditional models of the religious afterlife, and the processes by which representations of the afterlife illuminate and influence contemporary social systems. While I touched on each of these three questions in my final section, I would now like to visit them in more detail during this conclusion.

Individual Desire and Collective Concerns

I argue in my sixth chapter that contemporary spirit-travelogues like *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* reveal the individual desires and collective concerns of their author and the congregants who participated in their production. Freud has famously argued against the relevance of similar practices by “spiritualists” in Europe who believed they could communicate with the spirits of the deceased. He proposes:

They have called up the spirits of the greatest men and of the most eminent thinkers, but all the pronouncements and information which they have received from them have been so foolishly and wretchedly meaningless that one can find nothing credible in them but the capacity of the spirits to adapt themselves to the circle of people who have conjured them up. [Freud 1962:35]

Although Freud's pessimistic pronouncement is partially correct, the practice of spirit-writing will never reawaken real historical figures, spirit-writing can reveal a great deal about those who strive to do so.

One of the most apparent aspects of this revelatory material is the inclusion of collective concerns and individual desires. At first glance, many of the collective concerns present in spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks seem to be focused on specific, outside corrupting influences, such as globalization and the corresponding propagation of unfamiliar technologies. This retreat to the afterlife in response to the forces globalization is not new. For instance, Lang and Ragvald (1998) have investigated how spirit-writing was utilized as a comforting response to the influx of foreign powers in late 1890s Qing China. Specific, contemporary concerns certainly monopolize much of Yang's journeys to heaven and hell and the collectives who have chosen to participate in the otherworldly imaginaries found in spirit-travelogues or mythological theme parks are clearly unsettled.⁴³⁹ In one chapter, frequently referenced by adherents at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies, Yang provides a detailed description of a purgatorial DMV where tortured souls who injured others with their reckless driving are punished...

Traveling up and down a narrow and hilly road which is covered with sharp stones and sand. Each sinful soul is pulling a cart much like an old-fashioned rickshaw. Each cart is fully loaded with red bricks and because of its weight each soul has great difficulty controlling the loaded cart while trying to descend the narrow, sloping road. The road is very narrow, just wide enough for the cart's wheels and a moment of carelessness will cause the cart and the soul pulling it to fall into a ditch at the bottom of the hill. Those pulling the carts are bare footed and pressure on their feet from stopping the cart from sliding down the hill causes their feet to blister and bleed. This blood stains the narrow road... This is a new punishment which suits these contemporary times and is very severe. [Yang 1978:208-209]

⁴³⁹ Song states, "*Record of a Journey to the Underworld* contains lots of information addressing the various social problems that developed after Taiwan 1970s economic prosperity" (1984:5).

While these contemporary, collective concerns should not be discounted, I believe that these concerns, whether globalization or the general Buddhist notion of continual corruption, actually stem from a concern of a more general duration shared by these collectivities: aging.

Scholars have invariably gotten bogged down arguing whether issues of national identity (Clart 2005:109) or the economic forces of globalization (Song 1984:5) are more existentially threatening to those who seek solace in conceptions of the afterlife for the woes of this world. I assert that while national identity and globalization are some of the cultural crises which routinely merit collective concern, the most existentially unsettling crisis for those who regularly participate in representations of the afterlife is their own mortality. While framed by the creators and participants of spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks as a response to a specific, all-consuming collective concern, any noticeable unsettling of the social order brings the differences between generations – and thus an age group’s mortality – into sharper relief.

Record of a Journey to the Underworld begins with a preface by the Jade Emperor that conveys this sentiment. Yang speaking as the divine ruler exclaims, “The moral obligations of human beings have been lost or thrown away, males do not possess a sense of loyalty or filial piety and females have lost their integrity, chastity, and purity” (Yang 1978:5).⁴⁴⁰ This rage, focused on socially productive (and unapologetically conspicuous) men and women, occurs throughout contemporary spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks and pervades the conversations of

⁴⁴⁰ *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is similarly replete with references to modern moral depravities. During Yang’s fifth journey to heaven, the deity Taishang Daozu (太上道祖) explains, “Even though I reside in the carefree environment of heaven, my heart aches when I observe modern society and the small number of people who are pursuing moral action” (Yang 1981:29).

their creators.⁴⁴¹ Discussions of the afterlife serve as the perfect forum to address the disenfranchisement that the elderly feel, allowing them to craft what they view as a divinely just landscape that punishes the presumptuous and rewards the faithful. Ironically, another solution proposed in these texts is not an acceptance of age or death but a stubborn desire to remain ageless. Yang is promised by Lord Donghua on his twelfth journey to heaven that if adherents spend time outdoors in nature, breathe fresh air, eat healthy food and go about “one’s business in a relaxed manner, and participates in pure matters, you will increase the health of your body and mind...and you will retain your youthful essence” (Yang 1981:91).⁴⁴² While this Daoist emphasis on longevity (or the ever-present hope for some divine justice in the future) may assuage the concerns of some participants, many refuse to submit to this fate and continue to seek for something more individually appealing.⁴⁴³

Individual desires can be found throughout spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks yet just like collective concerns, what is most interesting are not the specific desires themselves, but the fact that so many of them are shared more generally by many contemporary Taiwanese (and global) citizens. Madsen (1984:11) states that the Chinese villagers he studied from the 1960s to the 1980s, located in Guangdong province, were not motivated by the utilitarian individualism paradigmatic

⁴⁴¹ Virtuous souls in heaven confide to Yang that they have attained their paradisiacal status because they “observed and obeyed the human relationships” their entire life (Yang 1981:164).

⁴⁴² In fact, Yang is told, if it were not for the avarice and enmity of humankind, the world’s scientific and technological advancements could “turn the human realm into a world much like heaven. People could travel freely throughout this world, coming and going with plenty to eat and wear. This mortal life would be similar to that of the lives of the Buddhas, gods, and immortals” (Yang 1978:39). During his 18th journey to heaven, Yang asks an immortal woman about her youthful appearance and her answer also underscores the superiority of the spiritual over science. She says, “Maintain a chaste and clean nature and the face will appear fresh and glow. If one’s heart is unsteady, no expensive face wash or exclusive massage will be able to maintain one’s youth” (Yang 1981:136).

⁴⁴³ Teiser explains of this ideal past, “Most Daoists have argued that the meaningful past is the period that preceded, chronologically and metaphysically, the past in which the legendary sages of Confucianism lived. In the Daoist golden age the empire had not yet been reclaimed out of chaos. Society lacked distinctions based on class, and human beings lived happily in what resembled primitive, small-scale agricultural collectives. The lines between different nation-states, between different occupations, even between humans and animals were not clearly drawn” (1996:7-8).

of moral discourse in the West, but tended instead to adhere to a classic Confucianism. While this may have been partially true in superficial public discourse, there is certainly some utilitarian individualism present among those who participate in popular Chinese religious practices. This argument is easy to support for the sectarians who participate in spirit-writing, as these individuals chose to participate in these organizations independently of their families and often consider themselves to be under the direct administration of heaven, not a local deity.⁴⁴⁴

While sectarians are drawn, for a myriad of conscious and unconscious reasons, to a religious structure whose membership and doctrines are more individualistic than popular religious practice, I believe that individualism in popular religion has been inadequately investigated. With the contemporary trend towards neolocality and greater economic freedom, the argument could certainly be made that participation in popular religion can actually be as individualistic as sectarian membership. A corroboration of popular religion's individualism can be gleaned from the hundreds of fieldwork interviews I conducted. While many of those questioned thought that heaven was very difficult for the average citizen to attain, every single one also professed the belief that they were among those who could attain it. This individuality stands in clear distinction to Ahern's findings. She reveals that at the time of her fieldwork in Taiwan, "Only an extremely exceptional man would have a chance of going to [heaven] I was told, and nowadays, no one is that exceptional" (Ahern 1973:221).

⁴⁴⁴ Clart (1996:108-109) explains that in 1971, right before the Hall of the Sages and Worthies moved to a new location, the congregation received a revelation which stated that the Hall was now under the direct supervision of Southern Heaven. As Clart explains, "This means that the Shengxian Tang was now removed from the jurisdiction of the territorial deities of folk religion (such as the earth and city god of its location), and made directly subordinate to Southern Heaven. This status emphasized the Hall as the bearer of a celestial mandate to 'proclaim transformation on behalf of Heaven' (*daitian xuanhua*)" (1996:109).

I believe that certain modes of spirit-writing can be considered akin to psychological techniques like free-association in their ability to allow psychological sublimations the space to be released. Thompson explains of spirit-writing, “Sometimes there are unlooked-for manifestations. Most frequently it is evil spirits who, getting possession for a moment of the brush, seize the opportunity to write nonsense, or obscenities” (1982:99). Other historical accounts of spirit-writing reveals what appears to be a purposeful inclusion of individual desires in their writings. Zeitlin (1998:125-127) explains that a historical Chinese spirit-writer, You Tong (尤侗) (1618-1704 ACE), wrote a drama titled *Celestial Court Music* (Juntian yue 鈞天樂), written in 1657, in which he cast himself as the male lead who, in the text, is transported to heaven, earns first place in the heavenly examinations, and eventually finds his dead betrothed and weds her in heaven. The individual desires present in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* include the wish to avoid hell and gain access to heaven, to share in the autonomy enjoyed by the gods, a desire for renown and recognition, a space to practice progression and regression, and a desire to punish and be punished.⁴⁴⁵ While it is possible to locate these individual desires in sectarian texts, can similar desires be found among the popular religious participants that visit mythological theme parks? I will attempt to locate these individual desires while discussing the applicability and adaptability of traditional models of the religious afterlife in the contemporary period.

Applicability and Adaptability of Traditional Models of the Religious Afterlife

The creators and staff – actors I have termed cultural intermediaries – at mythological theme parks consistently expressed one explicit and collective goal: their

⁴⁴⁵ When investigating the desire for renown and recognition I asked Yang why his face appears on the majority of his magazine’s covers he coyly replied, “My face serves to promote this temple and Buddhism throughout Taiwan.” Even when individual desires intersect socially sanctioned goals, I believe that it is not too outrageous to propose that motivation is supplied, at least in part, by individual desire.

intent to influence visitors to become, or remain, moral citizens. In the attempt to encourage attendance, particularly among younger visitors who are thought to be in dire need of moral direction, mythological theme park creators have utilized techniques found at secular theme parks and haunted houses. Nowhere is the blending of, and tension between, traditional and contemporary more palpably present than at the ever-adapting Palace of Southern Heaven in Zhanghua, Taiwan. This mythological theme park, which originally offered free admission and featured depictions of heaven and hell, now charges an entrance fee and has replaced its representations of heaven with a “Ghost House.” Mrs. Li,* a long-time employee, explains, “About ten years ago, when the theme park began charging an entrance fee, we were forced to replace heaven. Teens were the main source of revenue, and they always asked for something scarier. This forced us to redo the upstairs as a house of ghosts and demons.” While over-engineered (and often run-down) representations of the afterlife at contemporary mythological theme parks are designed to positively influence visitors’ moral actions, these locations now provide a location where, as Adorno proposes of mass culture, “the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through” (1991:121).

This tension between tradition and contemporary entertainment has had an unintended consequence: modern mythological theme parks have been over-produced as “hyperreal” environments. Baudrillard outlines the nature of these environments explaining, “Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1994:1). For Baudrillard, the quintessential example of a hyperreal environment is Disneyland, which he calls “a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra” (1994:12). Although it is the imaginary worlds depicted at Disneyland that are the anticipated attractant for visitors, Baudrillard proposes, “What attracts the

crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the *religious*, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys” (1994:12). For many visitors to mythological theme parks, participation and its result is limited to simple entertainment: exhilaration, laughter, and relief.⁴⁴⁶ Yet my research also reveals that self-identification may occur unexpectedly for some visitors whose desires more closely correspond with the immortals in these scenes than the mortals, torturers than tortured.

Visitors are encouraged to appropriate childhood memories of familial and educational abuse as deserved – or even loving – instruction and taught to fear – or even demonize – natural physical processes like childbirth. Yet willing involvement in a masochistic narrative, and subsequent submission to private, public, textual, or verbal torture, has long puzzled researchers. In the search for why individuals with nothing to gain in maintaining an oppressive hierarchy often willingly create and participate in representations of an afterlife which represses individual desires, some scholars have proposed that participants in these spaces of fantasy have access to agency in assuming the role of punisher. The opportunity to administer this “righteous” punishment is often viewed as reward for delaying the immediate gratification of a sin. While the prospect of administering punishment is certainly a draw for some, I believe that purgatory serves its most central function by maintaining a “fantasy of frustration” for its participants. Participants’ individual desires are manifest in the opportunity to participate in these egocentric imaginaries whilst being assured that the prohibitions in purgatory will maintain their compulsive urges.

⁴⁴⁶ For some younger participants, this laughter of relief can take several trips through representations of hell to emerge. As Piaget proposes, “For it is clear that although play sometimes takes the form of repetition of painful states of mind, it does so not in order that the pain shall be preserved, but so that it may become bearable, and even pleasurable, through assimilation to the whole activity of the ego. In a word, it is possible to reduce play to pleasure-seeking, but with the proviso that the pursuit of pleasure is conceived as subordinated to the assimilation of reality to the ego” (1962:149).

To continue a line of analysis started in my second chapter, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Buddhist and Daoist notions of paradise constitute a narcissistic fantasy of our individually desired state of being (Cohen 1988) and serve to motivate one aspect of the drive, the axis of iteration, by offering an imaginary vision of full enjoyment or *jouissance*. When this complete satisfaction is never attained, the collapse of the ego and its drives is forestalled by the fantasy that full satisfaction is attainable some time in the future (in this case, a future imagined to occur after congregants amass enough merit and, most importantly, pass from this world to the afterlife). Hell serves as an imminent reminder that if one pursues individual desires without abandon, the individual is doomed. Thus, representations of the tortures in hell are so popular in contemporary society not because they have afforded some of their participants the opportunity to imagine punishing their antagonists, parents, or other agents of socialization, but because they serve to alleviate the fear that these prohibitions will be taken away, a path that leads to full *jouissance* and the eventual collapse of the drives.⁴⁴⁷ While the hyperreal environments at mythological theme parks, created through the blending of traditional and contemporary, encourage some participants to assume the role of heavenly immortal and hellish torturer, how have spirit-travelogues been updated and what are the consequences of these modernizations?

As I explained in my sixth chapter, the spirit-travelogue genre arose during a period of extraordinary economic growth, social change, and moral upheaval. While the audience for this type of esoteric literature was once very limited (Russell 1990:117), the use of colloquial dialogue, creative narrative accounts, unifying plot

⁴⁴⁷ This is evidenced at times when freedom for individuals increases and new and stricter guidelines are self-imposed.

structures, and travel to otherworldly realms led to the widespread propagation of this type of religious literature. Clart states:

The great success of the *Diyu youji* showed the existence of a market for entertaining, vernacular religious literature; the subsequent explosive development of the spirit-travelogue genre and other vernacular shanshu is the product of inter-hall competition for this market. New style phoenix halls had to cater to the taste of their clientele as they wanted to get their share of the big pie of merit money available on the religious market. [1996:326-327]

Record of a Journey to the Underworld and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, which have both been posted in their entirety online at sites like <http://www.webhope.info/> and <http://www.chinamorality.org.hk/big5/publication/>, feature some of the same adaptations utilized by the creators of mythological theme parks but with vastly different results.

Yang Zanru, the author of these contemporary spirit-travelogues blends the traditional and contemporary in his widely-read tales of the afterlife. Yang borrows from historically similar texts by utilizing textual continuities such as similar content, structural parallels, analogous characters and an intended purpose that all generally correspond with historical accounts of the afterlife. As previously stated, even the minor modernizations included by Yang, such as new hells created to punish Westerners or those who misuse the scientific and technological advancements they have introduced, are based on historical precedent. Eberhard explains that spirit-writers in nineteenth century China, similarly grappling with the applicability of their own representations of the afterlife, introduced a new sub-hell patterned after the large amusement pavilions open to the rich in all major Chinese cities. Here there are women with fancy make-up and waitresses who serve beer, foreign drinks, wine, and cigars “but the drinks are in reality liquid copper or iron, the cookies are iron balls, the

cigarettes burn the smokers” (Eberhard 1967:38).⁴⁴⁸ While Yang has also placed contemporary characters in the traditional settings of heaven and hell, much like the creators of mythological theme parks, he has updated the ethos and appearance of these characters to correspond with modern sensibilities.⁴⁴⁹ Thus self-identification generally occurs with the modern figures in these traditional settings, not the immortal and demonic.

Record of a Journey to the Underworld and *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* do contain some significant changes from earlier spirit-travelogues. These include doctrinal innovations, individual additions (including the re-engineering of history), and changes in the amount of detail that Yang has included. Most notable among these doctrinal innovations is an emphasis on salvation and increased access to heaven, the inclusion of lecture-based rehabilitation, and modern moderations of some of the harsher punishments in hell. One of these adaptations is located in the tenth chapter of *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. There, parents are instructed to raise their children lovingly without any expectation of later material rewards, as opposed to the pervasive belief that children should be raised with the responsibility of later supporting their parents. Yet another modern moderation can be seen during Yang’s (1978:46-47) ninth journey to hell when he is told that men who believe that their womanizing is justified to offset the debt that women owe men in a previous life is not accurate and will not be permitted.

⁴⁴⁸ There is also a sub-hell, said to have been created between 1851 and 1861, for “persons who believe in such false religions as those that claim that the soul ascends to heaven... These persons – obviously Christian – are still Chinese and remain under the jurisdiction of Chinese deities, whatever their own religion may tell them” (Eberhard 1967:38-39).

⁴⁴⁹ Feuchtwang proposes that this incorporation of history into religious ritual always occurs in some form as, “Religious rituals are always anachronistic; whatever their social function, the anachronism is precisely what provides their symbolic power” (1992:40). This tie between religious representation and powerful historical ideal is also referenced by Nickerson, who states, “Most discussions blithely skip over this issue, referring to the bureaucracy of the other world as an obviously more or less accurate reflection of this-worldly administration, all the while failing to note that the Jade Emperor’s earthly counterpart can no longer be found” (2001:188).

While some scholars, such as Lang and Ragvald (1998:131), seem to believe that spirit-writers merely uncritically revives tradition, Yang serves an example of an author who attempts to reshape and recreate the past while influencing the present and future. This co-optation is also viewed as a process of mutual exchange. While Yang has realized he can attempt to employ technological innovations in the service of traditional goals, he also understands that an ever-modernizing world will do the same with his and others' traditional teachings. Jigong explains on Yang's 26th journey to heaven:

Originally, when reading books one hoped to become more virtuous and cultivated but now this has become a way to become rich and make money. This causes me much consternation. I hope that mortals will take the *Dao De Jing* as their textbook and not as a business plan. The purpose of reading is to enrich one's knowledge and enhance the quality of human nature. If books degenerate into a tool to make a living they will be considered "paper money" and lose their value. If knowledge becomes learning new methods to commit crimes this will lead to intellectual decadence! [Yang 1981:169]

This same level of self-conscious reflectivity in the struggle to update spirit-travelogues is certainly not evident in those who created mythological theme parks and, I believe, leads directly to separate consequences for the desires of individual participants.

Illumination and Influence of Contemporary Social Systems

The final research question I would like to address in this conclusion is the way in which representations of the afterlife illuminate and influence contemporary social systems. As I mentioned in my fifth chapter on popular Chinese literature, supernatural tales have long served as assessments and appraisals of societal structures, particularly in turbulent times.⁴⁵⁰ These tales, of course, should not be taken

⁴⁵⁰ The tale "Juan Chan and His Visitor" from *In Search of the Supernatural* underscores the historical continuity of this interest in the supernatural. In this story Juan Chan receives a visitor and the discussion begins with banalities like the weather before turning to an argument on pressing issues of that time. As the text explains, "After Chan had spoken with him for some time, the topic became gods and ghosts" (Gan 1996:184).

as a direct reflection of the social systems of their time. Clart explains of morality books:

Their reflection of these conditions is distorted by their normative intent: *shanshu* do not describe social conditions; they evaluate them according to explicit moral standards. Their aim is to reform decadence and disorder by means of a popular Confucian program or moralism. Thus, *shanshu* are not mirrors but commentaries on and critiques of their times. [2003a:86]

No supernatural tales have contained as scalding a critique as those focused on the “heterotopias” of the afterlife, imaginaries which are “simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (Foucault 1967). The measured distance between the afterlife and the everyday reality of Taiwanese citizens is certainly part of the otherworld’s charm. That it allows participants to escape and redress some of the perceived injustices of this world would be lost if the two worlds were to remain in close proximity. Despite this necessary distance, I believe there are at least two direct influences of conceptions of the afterlife on modern social systems: the lingering corporal punishment in Taiwanese schools and the new culture of surveillance that has spread island-wide.

Employees at mythological theme parks and sectarians who participate in spirit-writing both view their actions as crucial stop-gaps that address the perceived shortcomings of the contemporary educational system. These oft-heard critiques, as previously stated, usually begin with the popular saying, “Education today is not sufficient.” In memorable representations of hell, sinful souls are displayed receiving painful, bodily punishment. The sins prominently portrayed in Chinese representations of hell upset social norms and have been labeled “crimes of extraction” by Orzech (1994). At the Prefecture that Represents Heaven in Madou, courts two through nine feature socially disruptive sins punished according to the principle of cause and effect. Here, girls who read worthless books have their eyes gouged out and youth who fail to

show proper respect to their parents or elders are ripped apart on Knife Mountain. By bolstering official government policies like the Cultural Resistance Movement through the perpetuation of these powerful didactic tales, cultural intermediaries display a tacit agreement with state systems that seek to rectify gaps in the educational system and a lack of moral training in this modern age.

Public punishment, once within the ambit of the magistrate, is now – as a writer for the Taipei Times explains – “used throughout the nation as a means of forcing students to be obedient, with many schools operating like personal fiefdoms using fear and manipulation to force students to perform well in exams, to ensure the school maintains a high grade average” (Staff 2005). Despite an attempt by legislator Guan Bi Ling (管碧玲), The National Alliance of Parents Association, and the Humanistic Education Foundation to ban corporal punishment in schools by amending the Fundamental Law on Education (*Jiaoyu jiben fa* 教育基本法), physical and mental abuse is regularly visited upon Taiwanese students (Lin 2005). Teachers frequently beat students with bamboo canes or whips, require push-ups or humiliating displays in front of classmates, and write students’ names on “blackboards of shame” publicly posted for ridicule. These methods of torture are often employed for minor infractions such as failing to promptly return homework or forgetting classroom supplies such as scissors (Staff 2005). Recent polls show that 65 percent of students admit to being physically punished in 2004, down from 72 percent the previous year (Staff 2005). The minor erosion of this decades-long policy of physical punishment, seen as a key cause for social decay, has prompted outrage from conventional educators and the elderly alike. Zhang Hui Shan (張輝山), the principal of Dongguan Elementary School in Gaoxiong explains, “Corporal punishment is not a moral issue, it is a cultural one. Teachers in Taiwan are not ready for such a change” (Staff 2005). While the cultural portrayal of impartial punishment and reward at mythological

theme parks and within spirit-travelogues serve as a comfort to citizens who increasingly worry about crime and unaccountability, they have also unfortunately led to the continuation of these outdated and cruel forms of corporal punishment that still occur in many Taiwanese schools.

The second direct influence of conceptions of the afterlife on contemporary social systems is the pervasive surveillance system that now blankets much of Taiwan. When I first lived in Taiwan, from 1998-2000, there were almost no visible public surveillance cameras. Upon my return in 2004, CCTV cameras of all shapes and sizes were visible everywhere. These surveillance tools, often both publically and privately owned, had even crept into the popular religious temples where I did much of my fieldwork. After becoming reacquainted with friends from my first stay, I asked them about the exponential increase of security cameras. One friend, Mr. Huang,* explained, “These cameras are actually here for our benefit. Without them we always worried about what was happening outside our homes and business but now we are secure.” Staff at mythological theme parks, where cameras conspicuously watch entrances, exits, and visitors as they walk through representations of the afterlife, were similarly smitten with this new technology. Despite the fact that Privacy International lists Taiwan as one of its eight worst “endemic surveillance societies” (2007), in talking to acquaintances, interviewees, and while monitoring local news sources, I never heard or read about anyone who had an aversion to, or argument against, these cameras.

I believe that popular conceptions of the afterlife can explain both the exponential increase in these surveillance cameras and the widespread acceptance of – and even enthusiasm for – their installment. *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*, published in 1978, reveals the pre-existing desire for this type of pervasive

surveillance installed nearly thirty years later. King Biancheng, the ruler of hell's sixth court, states:

In contemporary times, mortals say that there are no spirits or demons because of science. Therefore, we now see or hear of so many murders, robberies, treacheries, and lecheries throughout the nation. Thus people tend to live for today and don't care for tomorrow and if they are not being watched by the government they dare to do anything and everything. This is why we see so many moral obligations being flouted. [Yang 1978:198]

This text also reminds mortals that they are watched at all times by the gods and that their daily actions are recorded in ledgers of good and evil to determine their punishments and rewards in the afterlife. A similar sentiment is expressed in *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* where the popular religious conception and saying, "The gods reside three feet above the head" is quoted during Yang's eleventh journey to heaven. The fact that this type of surveillance network already exists in the afterlife has made it much easier to install as a permanent feature in this one. While these are two cursory examples of how conceptions of the afterlife influence contemporary social systems, I believe that otherworldly imaginaries exert pressure on a range of individual motivations and the social processes they participate in.

Conclusion

The creators and participants of spirit-travelogues and at mythological theme parks are multivocal and multivalent actors who blend tradition and innovation into contemporary representations of the afterlife. Despite resistances from scholars and interlocutors, I ardently believe that creation of and participation in these representations can be psychologically revealing, a theory supported by their patent use of symbolic material, possessed mode of production, and pervasive employment of individualistic manifestations. These individual desires include the wish to avoid hell and gain access to heaven, to share in the autonomy enjoyed by the gods, a desire

for renown and recognition, a space to practice progression and regression, and a desire to punish and be punished.

Throughout my final section, focused on the contemporary influence of conceptions of the afterlife in spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks, I have argued two simultaneous theses: rapid social change provokes anxieties which cause some people to participate in religiously inspired imaginaries and, perhaps more interestingly, that the search for unattainable desires is somehow inherent to the human condition. While scholars frequently focus on the specific concerns expressed in these otherworldly representations, national identity or modernization, these specific ailments may be indicators of a more general condition. In fact, one could argue that neither national identity nor global citizenship in a rapidly modernizing nation are truly what bother the members of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies or visitors to mythological theme parks, but that a general crisis related to the human condition and perpetual failure to achieve that which is desired is actually more important.

The cultural continuity of Chinese notions of the afterlife, particularly purgatory, is astounding in contemporary Taiwan. Popular spirit-travelogues and mythological theme parks are influential in both collective and individual spheres. Yet the emergence of individualistic – and unattainable – desires at these locations carries the unintended consequence of reproducing not just the social systems from whence they emerge, but its unfortunate reliance on the threat of violence to curb violence. Hedges proposes that this type of violent afterlife conditions children to “rely on external authority for moral choice” (2006:87). Although these ethereal imaginaries can provide participants the means to codify a lived reality, perhaps it is time to interpret and interrupt the course and discourse of these violent, exclusionary, and often unhealthy imaginaries.

APPENDIX 1

Basic Buddhist Cosmology:

This basic Buddhist cosmology, taken from Becker (1993:58) and (Matsunaga 1969:51-55), outlines a Buddhist cosmological model largely shared by both Mainstream and Mahāyāna traditions.

Ārūpyadhātu Realm	This world without form is inhabited by devas who have attained the Four Formless Absorptions (<i>catuh-samāpatti</i>). This realm features four spheres: the “Sphere of neither perception nor non-perception” (Naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana), “Sphere of Nothingness” (Ākimcanyāyatana), “Sphere of Infinite Consciousness” (Vijñānānantyāyatana), and the “Sphere of Infinite Space” (Ākāśānantyāyatana). ⁴⁵¹
Rūpadhātu Realm	This world with form is the first of the physical realms, its residents are not subject to pleasure or pain, and there are no sexual distinctions. The deva realms of this world begin with the five realms of the “Pure Abode” (Śuddhāvāsa): the realm of devas equal in rank (Akanistha), the realm of devas clear-seeing (Sudarśana), the realm of the beautiful devas (Sudrśa), the world of the untroubled devas (Atapa), and the world of the un-falling devas (Avrha). The next world, Brhatphala, corresponds to the fourth <i>bhūmi</i> and includes four realms: Asaññasatta, unconscious devas; Brhatphala, devas of great fruit; Punyaprasava, devas who are the progeny of merit; and Anabhraka, the cloudless devas. The Śubhakrtsna world, which corresponds to the third <i>bhūmi</i> , contains three deva realms: Śubhakrtsna, realm of devas of total beauty; Apramāṇasubha, devas of limitless beauty; and Parīttasubha, devas of limited beauty. The Ābhāsvara world features three realms which correspond to the second

⁴⁵¹ These spheres, which correspond to the fifth through the eighth meditative stages (*bhūmis*), are not inhabited by bodhisattvas.

	<p>bhūmi: Ābhāsvara, devas possessing splendor; Apramānābha, devas of limitless light; and Parīttābha, devas of limited light. The final worlds of this Rūpadhātu realm are the Brahmā worlds which correspond to the first bhūmi: Mahābrahmā, the realm of Great Brahmā; Brahmapurohita, the realm of the Ministers of Brahmā; and Brahmapārisadya, the realm for the Councilors of Brahmā.</p>
Kāmadhātu Realm	<p>At the zenith of the world of desire are the six heavenly realms: Parinirmita-vaśavartin, the heaven of devas with power over others creations; Nirmānarati, the heaven of devas delighting in their creations; Tusita, the heaven of the joyful devas; Yāma, the heaven without fighting ruled by Suyāma; Trāyastriśa, the heaven of the thirty-three devas located on the summit of Mount Sumeru; and Cāturmahārājikakāyika, the world of the Four Heavenly Kings who reign on the lower slopes of Mount Sumeru.⁴⁵²</p>

⁴⁵² The Kāmadhātu realm is also composed of the Realm of Humans (Manusya), Titans (Asura), Animals and Insects (Tiryag-yoni), Ghosts (Preta), and Hell (naraka).

APPENDIX 2

Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven:

This second appendix contains a complete translation of Yang Zanru's 36 journeys to heaven, first published in 1981 by Taizhong's Hall of the Sages and Worthies.

Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven

Taizhong's Hall of the Sages and Worthies

*Heaven and humans are as one;
This book was written to serve as exhortation to the world.
Ji Gong guides this journey;
Mr. Yang was selected as its author.*

- Translated by Brian G. Brereton -

Table of Contents	pgs. 2-4
Acknowledgments	pg. 5
Introduction	pg. 6
1 st Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Gate of Southern Heaven...Teachings of the Great Sage (Sun Wu Gong)	pg. 5
2 nd Journey: Travel to Southern Heaven to Pay Respect at the Jade Palace...Magistrate Wen Heng	pg. 11
3 rd Journey: Return to Southern Heaven and the Jade Palace... Teachings of Magistrate Wen Heng	pg. 15
4 th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Tai Qing Palace...Teachings of Tai Shang Dao Zu	pg. 19
5 th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Tai Qing Palace...Teachings of Tai Shang Dao Zu	pg. 25
6 th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Shang Qing Palace...Teachings of Ling Bao Tian Zun	pg. 31
7 th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the River of Three Clarities...Teachings of Elder He Shang	pg. 38
8 th Journey: Return to and listen at the Shang Qing Palace...Teachings of Ling Bao Tian Zun	pg. 45
9 th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Palace of the Jade Void...Teachings of Yuan Shi Tian Zun	pg. 56
10 th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Palace of the Jade Void...Teachings of Yuan Shi Tian Zun	pg. 66
11 th Journey: Third Journey to Listen at the Palace of the Jade Void...Teachings of Yuan Shi Tian Zun and an Imperial Audience with Lord Xuan Xuan	pg. 75
12 th Journey: Travel to and listen at the Dong Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Dong Hua	pg. 84
13 th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Dong Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Dong Hua	pg. 91

14 th Journey: Third Journey to the Dong Hua Palace...Inspection of the Flowers and Trees of Original Spirits	pg. 98
15 th Journey: Fourth Journey to the Dong Hua Palace...Inspection of the Flowers and Trees of Original Spirits	pg. 102
16 th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Nan Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Nan Hua	pg. 113
17 th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Nan Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Nan Hua	pg. 118
18 th Journey: Travel to and listen at the Xi Hua Palace...Teachings of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond	pg. 129
19 th Journey: Return to and listen at the Xi Hua Palace...Teachings of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond	pg. 135
20 th Journey: Third journey to listen at the Xi Hua Palace... Teachings of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond	pg. 139
21 st Journey: Travel to and listen at the Bei Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Bei Hua	pg. 144
22 nd Journey: Return to and listen at the Bei Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Bei Hua	pg. 149
23 rd Journey: Travel to and listen at the Zhong Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Zhong Hua	pg. 154
24 th Journey: Return to and listen at the Zhong Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Zhong Hua	pg. 159
25 th Journey: Travel to and visit the Eternal Peach Cave at the Mountain of the Nine Immortals...Lofty Immortal of the Vast City	pg. 164
26 th Journey: Travel to and visit the Great City...First Holy Teacher Confucius	pg. 167
27 th Journey: Travel to and visit the Western Heaven's Precious Palace of Heroes ...Sakyamuni Buddha	pg. 171
28 th Journey: Travel to and listen at the Southern Sea's Mount Po To...Teachings of Buddha Guanyin	pg. 177

29 th Journey: Travel to and listen at the Land of Western Paradise...Teachings of Amitabha Buddha	pg. 184
30 th Journey: Travel to and visit the Palace of the Three Courts...Imperial Official of Heaven	pg. 192
31 st Journey: Travel to and visit the Palace of the Three Courts...Imperial Official of Earth	pg. 199
32 nd Journey: Travel to and visit the Palace of the Three Courts...Imperial Official of Water	pg. 204
33 rd Journey: Travel to the Palace of Loyalty and the Palace of Filial Piety	pg. 210
34 th Journey: Travel to the Realm of <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> to Watch People's Return to Heaven	pg. 215
35 th Journey: Travel to the Three Realms, Encounter the Eight Immortals, and Examine the Wondrous Teachings	pg. 220
36 th Journey: Thanks given to the Multitude at the Banquet of the Palace of the Jade Pond	pg. 227

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
June 3, 1979

1st Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Gate of Southern Heaven: Teachings of the Great Sage

Poem: *The soul that travels to the heavenly realm is honored with glory. Throw off your worldly worries and forget your common cares. Seek out as a pilgrim the road of awakening. This phoenix gate⁴⁵³ is a sacred site that leads all to the barge of mercy.*⁴⁵⁴

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! After visiting each frightening and dark court in hell, you may feel that such a dark atmosphere causes people to be terrified. I believe that no one, except those who are deathly ill, would be willing to travel again to that horrifying place. After this old monk guided Mr. Yang through hell, many souls have ascended to heaven. Mortals have also changed their evil ways to good. Thus the amount of evil actions on earth has diminished and souls do not want to go to hell. They flood heaven's gate, lingering and hoping to get one glance inside. I travel everywhere in these cities looking for those who are fated to ascend to heaven. Today, I saw many people return from their evil ways to good. These people desire to climb the stairway to heaven and this is truly a heartfelt joy for me. Today there are several souls arriving, so I have particularly come to release the latch and open heaven's great gate to welcome all those righteous citizens to enter. Ha, ha! I have already used my "master key" to open the entrance to heaven's vestibule and gate. Mr. Yang, no one is willing to block our way on this road. From today on, you will accompany me and together we will enter heaven's gate. We will see all the beautiful sites, until satisfied. Since *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* was written and published, it has had a profound effect. All its readers are able to assist their inner righteousness to emerge and their bright souls then soar to heaven. The Jade Emperor will be forced to open heaven's gate to see them all and we can also take this chance to enter and investigate the heavenly realm. You have been appointed to shoulder this burden and I hope you can throw off your worldly worries so as to conveniently follow me and float around heaven. You can see that the lotus flower platform on which we sit has become larger. It also brightly sparkles and glitters. This is because of your righteous heart⁴⁵⁵ and noble ambition. For this reason we are able to receive the glorious and weighty responsibility of writing *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Emperor Wuji⁴⁵⁶ has ordered me to guide you around heaven. Quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

⁴⁵³ Spirit-writing temples like the Hall of the Sages and Worthies are often referred to as "phoenix halls."

⁴⁵⁴ The "barge of mercy" ferries soul to heaven and is captained by the Bodhisattva Guanyin.

⁴⁵⁵ Throughout this translation the word "heart" is often interchangeable with the word "mind."

⁴⁵⁶ Emperor Wuji is the most powerful Daoist deity.

Mr. Yang:⁴⁵⁷ It has been a long time since I have spoken with you, benevolent teacher, and I have missed you dearly. Today's decree to travel to the halls of heaven and write this precious record makes me feel that this is a weighty responsibility for which I am not qualified. Please teacher, lend me your guidance and support!

Ji Gong: If you sincerely fulfill your responsibilities as student, I will fulfill my reciprocal responsibilities as teacher. Today we will shoulder this burden together. As long as we do this sincerely, I believe we will have a pleasant and fruitful journey. You should have no hesitations on our travels so I have prepared a bottle of heavenly water for you. You should drink this first, which will cleanse you all types of worldly filth, so that you can ascend to heaven. Drink it quickly!

Mr. Yang: Thank you, benevolent teacher, for giving me this heavenly water. After drinking it my body and mind are refreshed and I feel invigorated enough to soar with the immortals.

Ji Gong: You are lucky. If you didn't drink this water I am afraid that your body would have been too heavy for this lotus flower platform to fly. Hurry and climb aboard so that we can begin our journey.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated but I am unsure, should I close my eyes?

Ji Gong: There is no need. Paradise is not like hell, so you are free to look at the scenery along the way. If the wind is too strong you can close your eyes and sit securely.

Mr. Yang: Okay, I am already seated. Please teacher, take off. Floating high in the air with the clouds below me I see a light on Earth shining brightly in the night. This is truly fascinating. It is the Hall of the Sages and Worthies that is emitting many rays of golden light that shoot into the sky like a rainbow or large searchlight piercing the sky. In front of us there are many clouds and an abundance of immortals coming and going. They are all coming to greet us or nodding in approval and smiling.

Ji Gong: Heaven is the area in which the gods reside and this mysterious world is one that mortals cannot see.

Mr. Yang: The wind whistles and we have arrived to heaven in an instant. Why is it so red hot up ahead? This heat looks threatening but many immortals and Buddhas come and go freely. Are they not burned by the intense heat?

Ji Gong: This location is near the gate of Southern Heaven. Because there are five directions in heaven, the gate to Southern Heaven is the gate of fire. All deities must pass through this gate to enter and exit. If their merit is not sufficient they would not

⁴⁵⁷ Mr. Yang, or Yang Zanru (楊贊儒), is also the author of *Journey to the Underworld* and currently runs a Chan Buddhist temple in Taizhong.

be able to enter. Heaven is divided into five sections: east, west, south, north, and center. The other four doors are closed and all those with insufficient merit find it impossible to pass through the flames of Southern Heaven's gate. You have already drunk the heavenly water so you are able to resist the extreme heat and will not be harmed. We will quickly dismount and switch to this cloud to enter the gate.

Mr. Yang: Okay. The guard at the front gate looks like the character from *Journey to the West*.⁴⁵⁸ He is holding a cudgel and constantly leaping about. This is most likely to stop us from entering.

Ji Gong: No, he is just showing off his kung fu.

Mr. Yang: Is this the monkey Sun Wu Gong?

Ji Gong: Yes!

Mr. Yang: According to what I've heard, Sun Wu Gong is only a fictitious character from a novel. How has he appeared here today at the gate of Southern Heaven?

Ji Gong: Actually, many people share this misconception. The monk San Zang, Sun Wu Gong's companion, was truly only accompanied by his own animal desires. If a cultivated person wishes to travel the road to the Western Paradise, their pure "Buddha mind" will surely be accompanied by their evil "monkey mind." These travelers must pass through many different types of temptation, including that of wealth and desire. If they learn to control their fickle minds only then will they be cleansed of all imperfections. This leaping monkey mind is most difficult to overcome. When you recognize that beauty is only passing, the lengthy and difficult road to the Western Paradise becomes infinitesimally shorter. Therefore, the monk San Zang's companion in *Journey to the West*, Sun Wu Gong, can be discussed but not seen. People should be sure not to underestimate the animal desire represented by this monkey.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. He is laughing and giggling while coming towards us.

Great Sage: Welcome buddha Ji Gong and the righteous "Holy Pen" Mr. Yang. You have been commanded to travel to and view heaven while authoring a precious text exhorting the world to perform virtuous actions. Southern Heaven's gate received two holy decrees, one from Emperor Wu Ji and one from the Gold Palace of the Jade Emperor on May 5th. We were to prepare for and welcome you both to heaven. Today, if I fail in my duty as host please forgive me.

Ji Gong: The Great Sage is too polite. Today, we have received orders to travel to and view this heavenly realm and interview the sages, gods, immortals, and buddhas of the three realms to facilitate the rescue of earthly souls. As we return to heaven at later

⁴⁵⁸ This seminal Chinese novel was published during the Ming Dynasty and its authorship is ascribed to Wu Cheng En.

dates in investigation, we will certainly cause a disturbance. Would you mind providing us with a more convenient method of entry?

Great Sage:⁴⁵⁹ Heaven was originally without any gates and there was just an enormous flame here. If one could not let go of all worldly cares, those who came to this location carrying even petty sins would be burned. If burned, the pain would be worse than any mortal pain and would cause one to fall to the lesser realms.

Mr. Yang: Great Sage, what types of experiences have you had guarding the gate to Southern Heaven?

Great Sage: I am at this gate in heaven every single day. I have seen so many gods pass through it would be difficult to count. Because the gods at the highest levels are very pure and their actions are righteous, they can enter and exit freely without any restrictions. Lesser deities need to display identification to gain entrance and they cannot rush through unprepared. My cudgel is extremely powerful and the lesser immortals that have met with it have all retreated. It was formerly called the “Jin Gang staff” and the “eternal Jin Gang treasure.”⁴⁶⁰ I am stationed here at heaven’s gate and it is my sacred duty to watch over the mortal world. Humankind has committed monstrous crimes and not many are allowed to pass through this gate. In the past I was the same-old naughty monkey, but now I have no more tricks left to play.

Mr. Yang: Today, we have been commanded to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and have begun our journey here at Southern Heaven’s gate. Please look after us, Great Sage, and expound the essentials to proper cultivation.

Great Sage: If this book, *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, is completed I may want to cause more trouble because if those who view this heavenly realm succeed in gaining entrance, through sincere cultivation, there will be more people here in the halls of heaven.

Mr. Yang: But that is great news. If heaven increases its enrollment you will have more companions here. How would this be troublesome?

Great Sage: I am just kidding, please do not take offense. What do you think I look like, a nut?

Mr. Yang: You look like a sage, a sage!

Great Sage: Ha, ha. Our previously discussed “path to cultivation” is extremely difficult to discuss in just a few words. Even with my ability to change shape into

⁴⁵⁹ Sun Wu Gong’s name in this text, Great Sage, arises from his nickname in *Journey to the West*, “Yi Tian Da Sheng,” or Heaven’s Great Sage.

⁴⁶⁰ These characters *jin gang* (金剛) have been translated as “diamond” in the title of the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛經).

seventy-two different forms, I cannot escape the Buddha's powerful grasp. Those wishing to become a deity must progress step-by-step along the path of cultivation. This path's essential points are based on five principles: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and belief. These five actions allow one to be the "master" of their own fate. People's minds often behave as a monkey, leaping around from day until night, while disobeying rules. It looks at, eats, touches, and takes what it wants. Evil thoughts have free reign, leaving one without a moment of peace as if swinging this way and that. There is no way this type of mind can leap into the clouds and enter heaven's gate. Thus, my name is Wu Gong or "awake to the nihility of life." This name teaches people to accept the emptiness of all things and to stop groping after material form. People's minds, fanciful and fickle, are inclined towards sin and burdened with these evil obstacles at the time of death. Carrying the filth of the world with them, these souls encounter the treacherous fire at the gate of Southern Heaven. When these people arrive they cannot handle its heat. Unless mortals have indestructible metal bodies, those unprepared to pass through this fire will be forced to descend to lesser realms. This is not because I am heartless and hit them until they depart. Formerly, those that wanted to pass through Southern Heaven's gate had to carefully protect their purity to enter. At this guard station in heaven, if one arrives with a pure body and wondrous form they have already accepted the "nihility of form" teachings and I have no authority to stop or apprehend them when they enter or exit heaven. Deities from lesser realms still cling to their illusory bodies and have not yet arrived at this state of emptiness. Thus they still need to rely on identification to enter and exit. Cultivated people share no such problem and they only need to let go of their desires and longings to freely pass through this gate.

Mr. Yang: What you have said is very true. Look at your head with the golden hoop which the Buddha has forced you to wear. You must be very calm and composed or you would not be able to enter the gate of Southern Heaven. The uncultivated are unable to climb or claw their way to paradise. When the cultivated climb the stairs to heaven they will not shake or waver but will make steady progress, step-by-step, and easily arrive in heaven. The fickle mind is most difficult to overcome. Who would dare ride a bucking horse on a slender staircase to ascend the path to heaven? No one! Those who want to ascend the road to heaven must first purify themselves, calm their hearts and minds, open their eyes to this wisdom, and allow the flow of dharma to wash over their bodies. If you follow these teachings, Sun Wu Gong cannot stop your entrance through Southern Heaven's gate. Is this not so?

Great Sage: Yes, yes! Those worthy enough to travel here are welcomed and respected by me, just like I have welcomed you two here today.

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! Today we had just begun our journey to heaven when we met you. After your fine teachings we plan to return to heaven and enter its gate for a more in-depth look. Mr. Yang, hurry and bid farewell to the Great Sage.

Mr. Yang: Outside of heaven's gates there are deities lined up in all directions. These beings are not smiling, look very solemn, and command respect.

Great Sage: These are the generals and soldiers of heaven; you do not need to be afraid.

Ji Gong: We are very grateful for your profound teachings, farewell.

Great Sage: I will command heaven's generals and soldiers to accompany your return.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: With my eyes open to this new wisdom, the sites here in heaven are truly beautiful and extraordinary.

Ji Gong: Yet our burden is heavy and the road is long. Mr. Yang, do not be too eager now and careless later. Just as the fast horse needs the whip, we will bravely set out on this journey to heaven so that all those fated will have the chance to enter. We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
June 10, 1979

2nd Journey: Travel to Southern Heaven to Pay Respect at the Jade Palace: Magistrate Wen Heng⁴⁶¹

Poem: *There are myriad ways to live but only one true path. Below the pagoda on Mount Ling⁴⁶² there is a Peach Flower Spring. The desire to ascend through the three realms must overcome the three minds. When the six correct actions are taken there is no room for the six evil senses.*

Ji Gong: Though there are many ways to live there is only one true path. If you are pure and trusting your path will be laid out for you. If one is able to achieve the three states of mind: nearing a mind that does not desire, a mind that does not exist, and a mind that will not arise, one is then able to ascend through the three realms to achieve a heavenly state of existence. To escape the six levels of reincarnation one must first cut off the six evil senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and desire. Once these six senses have been cut off, one naturally learns how to control their place in the six stages of existence and the six stages of reincarnation are naturally overcome. Mortals on the path to cultivation are absent-minded and often stunned out of their wits when multitudes of demons arrive and drag them to the depths of the sea. Therefore, their desire for the three minds and six correct actions is sidetracked and they are not able to ascend to heaven. Today, I have truly been awakened! If one wishes to ascend to heaven all worldly cares must be released and a pure mind attained. Once their worries are discarded, they are free to float up into the air and fly to heaven. It is time that we make today's journey to heaven. Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform so we can begin our journey.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Teacher, we can now depart.

Ji Gong: The lotus flower platform is floating in the air waiting to carry us both. We gradually slip this mortal world's pollution flying high over green mountains and white clouds. An auspicious breeze is blowing us towards a soft light that fills our field of vision, and in an instant we have arrived at the gate of Southern Heaven.

Mr. Yang: Why are there numerous soldiers and horses gathered today at Southern Heaven's gate? They look like they are waiting in combat readiness. The Great Sage comes towards us laughing and giggling again.

Ji Gong: Heaven has just completed its military drills and the soldiers are currently resting. Thus there are many heavenly soldiers and generals at this location. You

⁴⁶¹ This lesser known deity serves under the Jade Emperor in his Jade Palace.

⁴⁶² Mount Ling, 靈山, is featured in *Journey to the West* as Xuan Zang's first great obstacle. It is the highest peak in the Tianshan mountain range, located between Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan. It is also commonly thought to be the mythical mountain where all Buddhist and Daoist immortals reside.

should set your mind at ease and do not let this scene before us cause your mind to wander or become unfocused.

Mr. Yang: I will obey your instructions! The monkey mind has come and my desires will not depart, how is this problem to be solved?

Ji Gong: Take control and make the monkey mind depart.

Mr. Yang: Okay, my desire and monkey mind are departing.

Ji Gong: Just ignore these the next time they arise.

Great Sage: Welcome to heaven, Ji Gong and Mr. Yang. Please enter Southern Heaven's gate and investigate what is within.

Ji Gong: Thank you, Great Sage. Today we have planned to visit Southern Heaven's Jade Palace and the Magistrate Wen Heng. Would you please guide us inside?

Great Sage: Such being the case, please quickly follow me.

Mr. Yang: The Great Sage is so enlightened that he floats upon an auspicious cloud as if flying. We follow behind him and enter the gate. The heavenly realm is so very convenient. If the means of transportation are not sufficient, new clouds are created for all to come and go freely. I have devoutly studied and meditated yet I am unsure, will Ji Gong teach me this marvelous method of transportation?

Ji Gong: This is a good idea. I should probably teach you some of these methods. If you want to learn this "Wu Gong" type of kung fu please listen carefully to my teachings. Sun Wu Gong wears a gold hoop around his head and this is called the "Jin Gang head." His hand holds a cudgel which he can extend from earth to heaven or can contract so he can hide it inside his ear. This is much like the righteous man that extends himself to solve large problems yet can also focus on and solve small issues. The naughty Sun Wu Gong was thrown into Lord Tai Shang's furnace but was not burned and instead emerged with x-ray vision. Thus he not afraid of fire and is perfect for guarding the fiery gate of Southern Heaven. He can change into a tornado and gracefully travel across the clouds. His vitality, essence, and mind are very powerful and guarded tenaciously so he can perform such actions. If you are able to similarly keep your spirit energized, from your feet to the crown of your head, your power will be like a hot kettle when the steam shoots out or a fire arrow shot towards heaven. You will certainly ascend and grasp liberation and freedom. I used to be able to leap three thousand *li*. Mortals that want to attain mastery of this type of kung fu must sincerely defend their vitality and devoutly cherish their gods. Essence is like water placed into a teapot and heated with coals. If one sinks into daily confusion when confronted with things desirable – alcohol or wealth – this is like the violent destruction of a ball that contains their precious essence. When one's merit is

destroyed and they have lost all vitality, how are they able to fly to heaven? This kung fu should be carefully recorded and remembered so that one can collect the mountains and rivers of vitality necessary to ascend through the three realms.

Mr. Yang: So it is only with this very powerful kung fu that one is able to fly!

Ji Gong: We have arrived at the Jade Palace and Emperor Wen Heng's district. Mr. Yang, please be silent and prepare to meet Magistrate Wen Heng. Thank you Great Sage for your guidance.

Great Sage: There is no need to thank me, I bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: I am here at Southern Heaven to see the Magistrate Wen Heng and I am accompanied today by my teacher Ji Gong. We have arrived, so please begin your instruction Holy Lord.

Wen Heng: There is no need for such formalities, please sit. Immortals, please quickly bring some tea.

Immortal Attendants: Yes, sir! It is here.

Wen Heng: My two guests, there is no need to be polite.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, please do not be so polite. Wen Heng has given you this tea of immortality and when you have finished it your cup will be refilled.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Wen Heng for this tea. The tea is clear, pure, refreshing, and sweet. It is truly excellent!

Ji Gong: This is Southern Heaven's true tea of vitality. Today, we have been commanded to author a book and we have especially come to visit you. Please Wen Heng, begin your marvelous instruction.

Wen Heng: You are both extremely hard-working! Your merit from authoring *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and mercifully saving many souls is vast. This news has reached the merciful Golden Mother and the Jade Emperor who have decreed that you begin writing *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Because this is the season for saving souls, the sages, gods, immortals, and Buddhas of the three realms are unusually busy. On behalf of all those souls fated to enter heaven, the Golden Mother and Jade Emperor have issued the command for all sages, gods, immortals, and Buddhas to descend to the mortal world and save people. Moreover, they have been commanded to set up the sanded tray⁴⁶³ for divination at Phoenix halls to

⁴⁶³ This method of divination, also referred to as the planchette, consists of a medium who writes characters in a tray of shallow sand which are then recorded by scribes and read aloud to a congregation.

establish a more convenient method of salvation. These innovative teachings⁴⁶⁴ declare a newly emergent truth which allows peoples' spirits to be rescued. Therefore, as the master of all Phoenix halls and their affairs on earth, all that enter this temple to attend a spirit-writing session are recorded in my register. Their merits and demerits are also registered and distinguished. Thus, I hope that all those who enter Phoenix halls for cultivation will use their true names. All those that enter Phoenix halls and pledge to work towards cultivation will be known in Southern Heaven. Those able to work diligently towards cultivation and accumulate merit will, after they have passed away, have ample reason to ask Ji Gong to return here to Southern Heaven and report their arrival. After examining the results of their merit an additional examination based on their karma will determine their standing. One may then fully partake in the joys of heaven. If one enters a Phoenix hall and later violates their pledge to accumulate merit they will be expelled to hell and receive bitter punishment within. In short, if you are cultivated and possess merit you will ascend to the halls of heaven but if you are not cultivated and do not possess merit you will descend to hell. These teachings are a certainty. People that do not constantly honor the relationships of filial piety will not be able to ascend to paradise. This causes me much pain! I hope that after these travels to heaven have been made known on earth, people will be able to change their direction and proceed towards this wonderful place. If they exhaust their efforts in arriving here it will bring me great joy.

Ji Gong: Thank you Magistrate for your teachings. Today's journey to heaven will end here, farewell.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for your beautiful words. Because our time is up we bid you farewell.

Wen Heng: I will command some of my immortals to accompany you on your return.

Immortals: Yes sir, we will gladly accompany Ji Gong and Mr. Yang back to their temple.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the Lotus Flower Platform.

Mr. Yang: Yes teacher, I am already seated. Please take off.

Ji Gong: The Halls of Heaven are vast and endless and our scheduled travels will take much bitter work to complete yet we have already entered heaven and begun this task. All of heaven is filled with blessings and when the soul travels through the heavenly realm it is filled with delight so why wouldn't people want to come here? We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

⁴⁶⁴ This innovative method (革新度法) allows righteous adherents to ascend to heaven without passing through hell; a significant change from earlier Chinese traditions.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
June 17, 1979

3rd Journey: Return to Southern Heaven and the Jade Palace: Teachings of Magistrate Wen Heng

Poem: *With the slightest wave of my fan a cool breeze arrives. The wonderful wine within the flask washes through my body.*⁴⁶⁵ *People that study my habits use this as an excuse to imbibe. I, the living Buddha, reside happily everyday in my temple.*⁴⁶⁶

Ji Gong: In my hand I hold a fan that I often wave. I have a flask of delicious wine which I constantly drink. I am a wilderness, not monastic, Buddhist ascetic. Are those few people able to learn about my life falsely set at ease? My wine has no flavor and my fan's breeze is not cool; what is happening here? Some people have said, "Ji Gong loves to eat dog meat, drinks lots of wine, and madly stumbles about." These people believe that I am not respectable, but they are actually mistaken! There are monks on earth that eat meat and though there is only one monk in heaven that drinks wine, I recall in former times that when watching the monks on earth from heaven some professed to be vegetarian that were not. You must possess righteous wisdom to see my Buddhist teachings. Many monks only come to the monastery to eat. I could not tolerate this type of action so I came down to assist on earth. In a former life my nickname was "Cultivation and Salvation" and, in order to save many sentient beings, I feigned that I was crazy and traveled throughout the human world. I acted especially strange around those evil monks who had ulterior motives. When they said that something was not edible I ate it and when they said I couldn't go somewhere that was where I went. I contradicted them in order to save worthy souls. Therefore, some unknowledgeable practitioners think that I am one of Buddhism's demons. They should know that while I am stumbling about my mind is firm. What I preach are the true teachings, not the false teachings taught by others. Those monks only beg for alms to support their own lives. When I lived among them I would often bump into and break their rice bowls. At that time, the monks would insult me, scold me, and hate me. Even today, many Buddhist monks have a false view of my existence and believe me to be an "impure monk." They do not know that in my current state, my body is pure while in contact with the three realms. Whenever I eat meat or drink wine I can only taste it briefly and it never fills me up. It changes within my mouth and according to my monastic companions this is called "nothing consumed has flavor." When people meet me they laugh and giggle. I am this type of Buddha, a joyful Buddha, the Living Buddha Ji Gong. Ha, ha, people don't worship a living Buddha but instead worship a Buddha that has long been dead. It is pitiful, so pitiful! Those that meet me often do not understand Buddhist teachings. Now is not the season for rescuing souls. I have played a trick on all so that people won't just go to the temple

⁴⁶⁵ The common saying that drinking alcohol washes one's sins away became popular after the transmission and transformation of Buddhist regulations in Chinese society.

⁴⁶⁶ Ling Yin Temple, located in Hanzhou, China, is the temple where the historical figure Ji Gong resided.

but also create Buddhist households. Many people can then become like the Buddha. Today I will stop here as I must guide the righteous Mr. Yang to visit heaven. We are truly so busy that I should not have said so much. Mr. Yang, let us depart.

Mr. Yang: Teacher, you have shared so many of heaven's truths. Those mortals that laugh at you are completely mistaken!

Ji Gong: Do not worry. I will continue to watch over average households, not those people in magnificent temples. In any case, I do not have the moral temperament of a fake and I just want to assist people in gaining entrance to heaven. If people laugh at me when I stumble about I will still show them mercy! Hurry and climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am seated, please take off teacher. Why have we come here today? This is the crossroads to the worlds of *yin* and *yang*!

Ji Gong: We have always traveled to and entered Southern Heaven's gate in the past. Today, I will bring you by this location before we travel back to Southern Heaven.

Mr. Yang: I have already seen the crossroads to the realms of *yin* and *yang* when we traveled to the underworld. Today I see a large road, with lights that shine and sparkle, ascending straight into the clouds. There are many people on this road. Some are carried in sedan chairs, some soar into the clouds, and others casually walk ahead. All have immortals, monks, or angels leading them, what is happening here?

Ji Gong: After people die, many that have committed righteous actions come here to the crossroads between the worlds of *yin* and *yang*. Some of these people do not need to enter hell to have their merit judged. These people come to this intersection between the realms of *yin* and *yang* and can directly ascend to Mount Xin Tou. What you have just seen is the road of righteous citizens that have committed many meritorious deeds. After death, each worthy emissary from every religion will return to the halls of heaven to report. If in life one has followed the correct path it needn't be complicated because those righteous souls know the machinations of the cycle of life and death and which road to follow. After death these souls will naturally ascend to heaven, like an old horse that knows the way home. Their souls, light as a feather, will freely float up to heaven. I will soon take you to see every detail of what happens to mortals when they pass away. Today, we must keep going to Southern Heaven's Jade Palace to visit Magistrate Wen Heng and hear his holy teachings.

Mr. Yang: Okay! I see some mortals that have passed away. They all have different types of halos floating above their heads according their religious convictions. Some have joyful expressions and are totally free and at ease. They look completely different then those souls that have been caught and are being dragged to hell weeping and sobbing.

Ji Gong: Of course they do! Those that ascend to heaven will return to a land of paradise while those who descend to hell will receive punishment. How are these two situations similar? Do people wish to ascend to heaven and receive their award or descend and receive punishment? Hurry, hurry! We must travel to the gate of Southern Heaven.

Mr. Yang: The lotus flower platform quickly takes off and Southern Heaven's gate appears in an instant. I can see the Great Sage in front of the gate brandishing his metal cudgel; always giggling and laughing.

Ji Gong: We will not stop at this gate again so wave in greeting to the Great Sage. ... We have arrived at Southern Heaven's Jade Palace. Mr. Yang, please let Magistrate Wen Heng know that we have arrived.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! Magistrate Wen Heng, we have arrived again at the Jade Palace. Please, holy and merciful teacher, begin your instruction.

Wen Heng: There is no need for such formalities, you two can both sit down. Immortals, please bring some refreshing tea.

Immortal Attendants: Yes, sir! The tea has arrived.

Wen Heng: You two are very hard-working. Ji Gong, you are carrying the weighty responsibility of saving all worthy souls. You are guiding Mr. Yang to see the three realms and author a book about your travels. This hard work increases your vast merit. The sacred edict to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is extraordinary. Because these heavenly secrets are being shared you must successfully urge people to do good or all this hard work will produce no merit at all. The Hall of the Sages and Worthies is authoring this morality book and sharing this righteous message with many people whose souls will be saved. If done correctly, this book will like a drop of sweet dew that moistens all things. If this book descends to your world, I am afraid that these exhortations will not be able to spread quickly or far enough. Therefore, *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* must be shared with the world's most precious and virtuous temple to be distributed to all. The path to heaven is not for only a few, but all those who are virtuous. Therefore, I hope that the author is honored and doubles his efforts to spread this message and thus reciprocates heaven's mercy.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for the merciful attention of the Emperor. We adherents are all devoted to the revival of Chinese culture and the reinforcement of morality. I will do my best to continue to impress you. When I return I will convey Emperor Wen Heng's message to the temple's adherents.

Wen Heng: The heavenly realm is so vast that if you visit every district I am afraid that you will never be finished with your travels. Therefore, I believe that it is best if

you just choose those areas that are most applicable to modern people to tour and investigate. This way your task will be completed earlier and this record can be issued and start saving souls. The meritorious Ji Gong will keep guiding you on these journeys.

Ji Gong: This is my responsibility. Magistrate Wen Heng, please smooth out a convenient path for us.

Wen Heng: You are so polite! Now you can find gods, people, and ghosts to visit and cultivate in the three realms of heaven, hell, and the human world. This time *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven's* most important role is to explain these truths to the world. This is the correct prescription for humanity's illness. This method will surely affect people's hearts. From today on you can use this blueprint to create a satisfactory "heavenly paradise" from which to instruct people.

Ji Gong: Many thanks to the Magistrate for his instructions which we will obey! Today we must bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for the Magistrate's excellent teachings, farewell.

Wen Heng: If you run into problems you can just follow my instructions. I will always be here to assist you.

Mr. Yang: Thank you for your attention, kind and merciful lord.

Wen Heng: I will command my immortal attendants to accompany your return.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform so that we can return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: I am firmly seated.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
June 29, 1979

4th Journey: Travel to and listen at the Tai Qing Palace: Teachings of Tai Shang Dao Zu⁴⁶⁷

Poem: *The Daoist Lord Xi Hua drives the young calf. The Buddha arrives from the east floating on a sacred vessel. Confucius corrals many horses on his tour of states. Jesus and Muhammad cultivate camels in the desert.*

Ji Gong: Heaven and earth were originally part of the same essence that contained everything within it. The founders of the five religions⁴⁶⁸ originally spread their teachings to all people. They used different methods of transmission, contained in vast quantities of scriptures written after their lives, which provide people the methods to ascend to heaven. These books have been compiled and changed by later generations and the path they now outline is more complicated than necessary.⁴⁶⁹ This is like following a treasure map that first points you in one direction and then the other. This causes those cultivated persons in search of precious knowledge to be as confused as one lost deep in the mountains. What they do not know is that each religion's truths are the same. That is, we must all peacefully get along, pursue righteous action, and exhort each other to do good deeds while ceasing moral degeneracy. I have seen those souls in heaven dwelling together as one. When people unite, heaven's virtue spreads through a religion that increases the number of people that are joyful, peaceful, and committed to a common purpose without despising, excluding, or maligning each other. The world's souls all originally lived in heaven before being scattered to every location in the world. While fending for themselves on earth they forgot their heavenly home. If shown heaven, people will recognize where they came from and wish to return. Therefore your temple, Taizhong's Hall of the Sages and Worthies, was commanded to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and reveal these heavenly secrets. This will cause mortals to recall clearly their soul's former good fortunes and wish to return to heaven at their earliest convenience. If a person fails to cultivate body and mind, at death they will sink lower and lower through the six stages of reincarnation to receive many punishments and are not able to be reborn. Mr. Yang, please climb aboard the lotus flower platform and prepare to depart.

Mr. Yang: I am sitting firmly, please depart teacher!

⁴⁶⁷ Tai Shang Dao Zu was reincarnated on earth as Laozi.

⁴⁶⁸ The five major religions according to this Chinese religious tradition are: Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam.

⁴⁶⁹ The example given in this text is a Chinese parable in which a teacher asks several students to draw a snake and promises the first one finished a draft of marvelous wine. One student quickly draws a squiggly line and looks up to see his classmates still hard at work. The student thinks that if the others are still working his snake must be missing some crucial element and adds feet. Thus the meaning, "more complicated than necessary."

Ji Gong: When piloting this beautiful lotus flower it soars through the sky, quickly ascending to the bright halls of heaven. This feeling of flying high to the immortals is like being crazy or intoxicated. When I fly I feel very relaxed and extremely comfortable. Disciple, why don't you speak up and share your feelings?

Mr. Yang: My heart feels free and clear. This location is magnificent and I do not see a depressing sight anywhere. What I see are fields of immortal flowers over which rare birds are circling and chirping. It sounds like they are singing the songs of the immortals. Here, strange birds and exotic animals go to and fro beneath the trees and through the flowers, green grass, and bushes. Actually, when I see this my heart feels as if it is in bloom or as if I am intoxicated. It is not the least bit inelegant. When I tour heaven the landscape is so exquisite that I truly do not wish to return to my common home.

Ji Gong: This type of immortal environment is truly one that is not seen in the mortal world; something that can only be found in heaven. Because you have not yet overcome your worldly passions, you are not able to stay here for long. You must return to earth and rejoin your congregation until you have reached an older age. At a later date you will be able to return here to travel through the mountains and play in the streams. You will be a long-term guest at this immortal mountain!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for your encouraging words. Before us there is a towering, glittering, golden pavilion. A one-horned, cyan⁴⁷⁰ cow approaches us. Why are cattle raised in heaven?

Ji Gong: That is Tai Shang Dao Zu's mode of transportation, a one-horned, cyan cow. It is an animal of the immortals, not a wild ox, so you need not be afraid as it comes to welcome us. The world's cattle are very pitiful. The strong plow fields, the old draw carts, dairy cows birth and rear calves, and beef is eaten by all. The contribution of cattle to the world is enormous. The Elder Lord watches over this cow, a heavenly cow that is the progenitor of all cattle on earth. The world has white, black, and brown cattle, but not cyan!

Mr. Yang: The palace towers in front of us. Its imposing manner sets it apart from all others. The Golden Palace resembles the shape of a cloud and displays a noble spirit that engenders a deep respect. Above us are the three words, "Tai Qing Palace" and their brilliant light dazzles the eyes.

Ji Gong: This is the residence of Tai Shang Dao Zu. The courts of the Tai Qing⁴⁷¹ Palace have also been called the "Dou Lu Palace" and serve as residence for much of heaven. Today we will visit this location first. Dao Zu, please begin your instruction on the good fortune of heaven and earth. This will provide people the means to enlightenment and a short cut to heaven for the cultivated. The author of *Record of a*

⁴⁷⁰ The color 青, or cyan, is an auspicious color found throughout heaven.

⁴⁷¹ Tai Qing (太清) is often translated as "ultra clarity."

Journey to the Halls of Heaven must first expound the secrets of traveling to this heavenly realm before Dao Zu takes his place as the true golden immortal, the first sage of heaven. You can then ask him to share other heavenly secrets.

Mr. Yang: So it is like this!

Ji Gong: Some immortal children form two lines to welcome our arrival.

Mr. Yang: Greetings, immortal children. According to today's heavenly decree you will be accompanying my Master and I and traveling through the halls of heaven. Please guide us ahead, immortal children!

Immortal Children: Welcome to heaven, Ji Gong and Mr. Yang. Our master has commanded us to assist you. Please follow us inside for your audience with Dao Zu.

Mr. Yang: Thank you for guiding us. ...After following the immortal children into Tai Qing Palace and entering its courts, solemnity and serenity abound. Heaven is calm and quiet and in the center court there is a white-haired, young-faced man⁴⁷² sitting on a large throne. In front of this throne is a large incense burner and smoke gracefully wafts upward. Dao Zu's entire body emits a light and it is so bright that my eyes cannot handle it. Greetings Tai Zhang Dao Zu, I have been commanded to follow Ji Gong through heaven and author a book about our journey. Today we have come to the Tai Qing Palace to interview you. Please merciful Dao Zu, begin your righteous instruction so that I can record your message in *Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and share it with the people on earth.

Dao Zu: There is no need for such formalities! Mr. Yang, please arise. Ji Gong, you too have been very hard-working. Please sit. Mr. Yang, your mortal body has not changed and your spirit's eyes are not opened because your spiritual prowess is not yet sufficient. When you come to this heavenly realm it is hard on your mind and spirit. Thus I will give you a heavenly pill to steady your will, body, and spirit. Please take it!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Dao Zu's merciful gift. There are actually some aspects of this journey that I cannot stand. While touring heaven, though beautiful, my mind and spirit are often uncomfortable!

Dao Zu: The reason that you are now out of strength is because you have now been traveling to heaven for thirty-three days. Only the most lofty and sincere sages are allowed to visit heaven. You are extremely blessed that you were commanded to journey here. This heavenly pill will help some, quickly swallow it.

⁴⁷² This appearance is the Daoist ideal, to look old and wise but be very healthy.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! I have taken it and I feel like there is a fire burning inside me and a powerful vitality rising within. My eyes are opened and I feel that I am already adapting to this environment. I am very grateful for your assistance, Dao Zu!

Dao Zu: This is the “pill of nine golden revolutions.” It has been cooked in the furnace of heaven for eighty-one years. It has been saved for consumption by someone who it is fated for. Today, Mr. Yang has come from such a far distance to heaven and this counts as fate!

Ji Gong: I am grateful that Dao Zu has given my disciple this heavenly pill which has bolstered his spirit. On our visit here today we hope that you will teach us the secret to the good fortunes of heaven and earth. These secrets will allow people to know the truth and return to heaven.

Dao Zu: The good fortunes of heaven and earth are mysterious. Except for those that are already enlightened, people are stuck guessing with only the half-truths that they have. This is because science and technology is flourishing on earth. The spirit of heaven and earth rotates because of many profound mysteries. Therefore, heaven will provide this extraordinary book, *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* to assist the modern world. My heart yearns to save all sentient beings who are not able to recognize truth and thus unable return to heaven. In this age that privileges the science of evolution, there is little room for the good fortune and mysterious truths of heaven and earth. Therefore, I will disclose “the mysterious creation of the universe” and some heavenly secrets to save sentient beings. Heaven is above, hell is below, and the human realm is located in between. These three separate realms complete the world. In the beginning, heaven and earth were combined and the sun and moon were not separate. At that time, all sages, Buddhas, and immortals were combined as a single ball of energy, glowing and revolving in space. This “Profound and Mysterious First Being” is also called the “Original Lord of Heaven.” Because this energy was located above it was called the “Supreme Being” or “God.” This being is the progenitor of all beings and is thus called “Heavenly Father” or “Heavenly Mother.” Because we do not know this entity’s true name it is called “profound and mysterious” and because we do not its origins it is called the “original beginning.” This is the “origin” of the Great Way and the “beginning” when everything remained nameless.

This revolving ball of energy then separated into three distinct entities: the jade entity entitled Yuan Shi Tian Zun, the entity above called Ling Bao Tian Zun, and the highest entity called Dao De Tian Zun. Though these profound and original entities can be separated, they are all the same entity. These three entities are complete when together and have their own shapes when apart. They are light and pure enough to float above to the heavens. These three entities created heaven and the sun, moon, and stars appeared. The three entities split again and formed the Five Elders: Elder Wood in the east, the Goddess of Metal in the west, Elder Fire in the south, the Elder Water in the north, and Elder Earth in the center. After creating these five elements, the earth was formed. Yet though heaven and earth were now created, humans were not present anywhere on this land. In order to create both heaven and earth The Profound and

Mysterious First Being marshaled the Five Elders that had come from the rotating ball of essence and sent them to give the earth shape. Because people were not present anywhere in the three realms, this Original Being commanded that the five elements produce them on the land below.

After receiving this order the five elements came together and chose the male Elder Wood and female Goddess of Metal to descend to the land below and complete the appointed task. Elder Earth chose a valley next to Xu Mi Mountain as a stove to complete the task of creating humans. He then searched for clay, which he formed into a ball on a giant potter's wheel. Elder Wood located the mountain's spirit in the east and took the round ball of clay and gave it three legs, creating a cauldron. The Goddess of Metal took the five best kinds of earth from the mountain's west and south and put it into the cauldron. Elder Water took black rocks and the purest water from the mountain's north and put them into the cauldron. He then covered it with a large lid. Elder Fire gathered mulberry wood from the south to heat the water. One of the elders pumped the bellows up and down to maintain the heat of the coals. Steam rose from the cauldron and when it settled the Five Elders knew their creation was complete. The elders decreased the heat and the caldron emitted light for seven days. Elder Earth, Elder Fire, and Elder Water watched from above to see if Elder Wood and the Goddess of Metal needed their assistance. Elder Wood and the Goddess of Metal created a stove and put the cauldron on it. The early mornings were cold and they were afraid that they would get sick so they stood in the sun to stay warm. At night they used the essence of the Supreme Being as a blanket of protection. Elder Wood and the Goddess of Metal disregarded their own comforts and worked very hard to finish this task. When their work was near completion they sprinkled a Daoist dew into the cauldron. There was a noise from within the caldron and Elder Wood and the Goddess of Metal knew their creation was finished. They peered inside and saw something huddled together deep inside the caldron. Mother Metal reached in and picked out an infant boy. Elder Wood reached in and pulled out a beautiful infant girl. The two infants laughed and jumped around the furnace of the Five Elders. The boy was Pan Gu and the girl was the Mysterious Jade Women, who have also been called Adam and Eve. These two infants eventually created all of mankind. This is how the essence of the Five Elders was combined to create people.

When the Five Elders combined their essence and created mankind, some of the vitality leaked out in the light that emitted from the cauldron and dispersed everywhere. This leaked essence became plants and animals of all kinds. This gave rise to the five metals, every type and shape of grass, tree, river, and ocean, as well as electric light and fossil fuels. Because people were originally created from earth, born from it and grown on its surface, when mortals die it is to the earth that they return. When the world was complete, the infant boy and girl emerged from the valley to live on its surface. Though these beings were originally pure, after living in the common world they became impure as the realms of *yin* and *yang* were mixed. This is because the Original Being, who encompasses both *yin* and *yang*, split to become three beings, five beings, etc.

These beings dispersed and formed every living being on earth, which is why common people are called "sentient beings" or the "nine and six original spirits."

There are nine realms in heaven and six districts on earth. These include every life form, which number not just nine or six, but 100 million. Though the Five Elders created humans, every being originates from the original ball of essence. Because mankind was created by the Five Elders there are five major human organs. There are also five distinct races around the world. In the five directions there are five colors: in the east people are cyan, in the west they are white, in the south they are red, in the north they are black, and in the center people are yellow. The color of each race was determined by the type of clay they were formed from and where in the giant kiln they were created. Because the duration and degree of heating was different, they came out in different colors: cyan, white, yellow, red, and black. When these humans dispersed throughout the mortal world they were all simple and unsophisticated beings, covering their bodies in the leaves of trees and possessing innocent hearts. Because they were pure, they lived, died, and returned to heaven.

Yet, as these early humans began to inquire after the nature of things their souls became polluted and some were not able to return to heaven upon death. These polluted souls sunk lower and lower until a lower realm, hell, was created. The Five Elders residing in heaven were sad that souls could not return and met together to devise a strategy to allow for the return of these souls. These Five Elders personally descended to earth and were reincarnated as the founders of the five religions in each of the five directions. There was a period of salvation, but this concluded when each of the founders passed away and their disciples began to fight over differences of doctrine. These followers split and began attacking each other, which harmed the spirit of the entire world. The Goddess of Metal, residing with the Five Elders in heaven, was very grieved that these souls could not return. Therefore, she sent out the decree that all those fated for heaven should be quickly exhorted to return to the correct path through means of the flying phoenix, which correctly interprets all religious teachings. This phoenix spread the teachings of heaven and encouraged all those that had gone astray to return. Thus in this latter age, a sacred meeting was convened to determine the most expeditious means to spread this message. The elders determined that the beauty and mysteries of heaven must be shared with the people of the world to lead them back to the paradisiacal realm of heaven. I am now helping the Goddess of Metal to fulfill her wish that all worthy souls return. I hope that all living souls will read this book and return to the proper path of righteous action and come back to this heavenly realm. All races should unite to fix the world's vitality and attain this distant paradise!

Ji Gong: We are grateful to Dao Zu for sharing these secrets of heaven in order to save sentient beings. Because our time is short, I must take Mr. Yang back to his temple but we will return at a later date.

Dao Zu: Okay. I will command my immortal children to line up and accompany you both back to the temple.

Immortal Children: Yes, sir! We will accompany Ji Gong and Mr. Yang back to the temple. We hope that they will both travel here again.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for Dao Zu's wonderful words and marvelous instruction. We must bid now you farewell. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, you can take off now.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
July 22, 1979

5th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Tai Qing Palace: Teachings of Tai Shang Dao Zu

Poem: Buddha resides on Mount Ling and entreats us from not far. Mount Ling resides in each of your minds. People have their own pagoda on Mount Ling. Turn towards your Mount Ling pagoda and become cultivated.

Ji Gong: This poem of the Way relies on the belief that people understand much, but it is not something that your mouth can recite and you will instantly understand. This is because there is some distance between the words in one's mouth and the thoughts of one's mind. The Mount Ling referred to in this poem is actually "Xin Tou Mountain," the mountain that stands at the intersection to heaven and hell. Those that are sent to heaven or hell are separated at this juncture. To learn the methods of personal cultivation, one need not search for answers in distant lands. Instead, only a mirror directed at oneself is necessary. Look at the reflection and determine, am I a good or evil person? Is my heart righteous or wicked? Mount Ling is within your heart and if you ascend to its lofty peak you will see the Buddha. This is the way to find the path to heaven. Today, I will again guide Mr. Yang's soul to travel through heaven and author a precious record that exhorts mortals to righteous action. Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please teacher, let us depart!

Ji Gong: Today we will return to the Tai Qing Palace and visit Tai Shang Dao Zu. As my disciple sits aboard the lotus flower platform, we quickly ascend to the heavenly realm.

Mr. Yang: Why is heaven so hot today?

Ji Gong: We are nearing the gate to Southern Heaven. This location is actually very far from the earth's atmosphere and has no oxygen. Because we are traveling so quickly it feels scorching hot.

Mr. Yang: So does heaven have any oxygen?

Ji Gong: Have you not heard that when astronauts enter space their entire bodies are protected and they must carry all the oxygen they will need from the earth's surface? If not for their equipment, astronauts would not be able to enter outer space. Mortals have bodies of flesh and blood and those who wish to reside in heaven do not generally have the ability to do so. These mortals must first cultivate themselves and develop "iron cudgel bodies" in order to adapt to this heavenly environment. Otherwise, when those with mortal bodies arrive here they will suffocate and perish.

Therefore, I hope that when people wish to move to the heavenly realm of outer space they will prepare their hearts for this harsh environment by clearing out all worldly pollution. Thus they will be able to float up to this heavenly realm and reside here. Take when Neil Armstrong traveled to the moon as an example. On his journey, he floated through space just like an immortal. This proves that life in space is carefree and comfortable for immortals and Buddhas! These immortals and Buddhas have refined themselves in order to live in space. Because their bodies of flesh and blood were purified and discarded, they are able to adapt to life in heaven and can come and go as they please without restrictions. I hope that people on earth know this!

Mr. Yang: Why is space so miraculous?

Ji Gong: The divine force that created space arranged each and every star and placed it into an orbital path. Because gravity produces large magnetic fields and these magnetic fields create electrical currents, the correct orbit of each star is maintained and they will not crash or collide. This is according to the great and marvelous direction of the Original Being that created all things. Science and technology is flourishing on earth and every star has already been charted and claimed by people who want to build space stations there. The miracles of space could be called the wonderful craftsmanship of heaven. Yet, there are those who are uncultivated are not open-minded or perceptive enough to see that there may be another true world. Using scientific instruments to survey the world is not sufficient and only scrapes the surface. These people surely have no way of comprehending life in the heavenly realm! This is like if you only looked at the sea's surface, missing all that lay below. That which lies below the surface of the sea is still only a small portion of the treasures that can be found in the universe. Isn't this small portion all that most can see?

Mr. Yang: Thank you merciful teacher for sharing these precious secrets. This is truly news that I will share with the world.

Ji Gong: These heavenly secrets are very precious but I have only revealed a few. I have saved many more to slowly share with the world's people! We will now continue our journey as we arrive in front of the Tai Qing Palace in an instant. Today, this location is silent and in the forest pavilions there are many immortal children sitting in repose with their eyes closed meditating on ultimate truths.

Mr. Yang: Their entire body emits light, what is happening?

Ji Gong: They are considering the universe and its profound achievements. Their minds are as empty as space as they meditate. This process naturally produces heat and light. We should not be enchanted by the scene outside. Let us quickly enter the palace and listen to Dao Zu's instruction.

Mr. Yang: Okay! That one-horned, cyan cow is resting beneath a tree and looks very comfortable.

Ji Gong: This is not an average cow. It is slowly progressing towards cultivation! Let us enter the palace court and listen to Dao Zu's teachings.

Mr. Yang: Yes! ...Respectful greetings Tai Shang Dao Zu. Today I have returned with my merciful teacher. Dao Zu, please begin your instruction!

Dao Zu: There is no need for such formalities! You two are so hard-working, please sit. I will command my immortal children to bring you both a heavenly, jade beverage.

Immortal Children: Yes, sir! ...We have brought it for Ji Gong and Mr. Yang's use!

Mr. Yang: We are very grateful for Dao Zu's kindness.

Dao Zu: There is no need to be so polite! When I learned that you two were returning today I was very grateful. Even though I reside in the carefree environment of heaven, my heart aches when I observe modern society and the small number of people that are pursuing moral action. In order for these people to return to heaven, a meeting was convened and it was decided that this heavenly realm must be described for those on earth. This will lead all sentient beings back to heaven. Therefore, the edict to author *Journey to the Halls of Heaven* was issued. This is a lengthy task and the burden is heavy. I have shared the good fortune of heaven and earth so that people can return to heaven and I will do my best to explain and spread these mysteries to people so that our task will not fail!

Mr. Yang: Today, people are satisfied with material possessions but their spirits are empty. Those that desire to be cultivated often don't know where to turn for direction. Each religious method has a different result. Please instruct us according to this problem Dao Zu.

Dao Zu: Even though the road to cultivation has many paths, the goal always leads one to heaven. Because there is no way to imagine the paradise contained within heaven, those that desire cultivation must first understand the Way's methods. When one is blind and aimlessly pursues cultivation, the entire body is exhausted and perspires, even though one is on the wrong path. This is truly pitiful. The first requirement for those that desire cultivation is fate. Those not fated for heaven will not recognize the Way. What place to rest and attain satisfaction will those that do not know the Way find in this vast world? Yet even the correct Way changes when followed. Those that do not know the will of heaven will have no means to follow the correct Way, even if fated for it. If one "knows the Way" it is like asking in all directions for the correct road but not knowing what time the train will depart. When these people arrive at the station, the train has already left. So even if these people are fated, if they do not know the correct time for departure, even with lots of hard work

they will not be able to find the correct track. Once the will of heaven is known, one will know when to advance and when to retreat. The path to cultivation is not hard but requires many cautious steps. If one is careless for even an instant, a train wreck could occur. Those following the Way cannot afford to make even the smallest mistake. If they violate rules they will not be arrested or punished, but their lives are in danger. During daily life, you amass a great amount of merit through good deeds and by eagerly following this road. If one always adds gas to their vehicle they will be able to achieve their goal. Yet those traveling in opposite directions are headed for a collision. If you commit actions that violate the rules of the Way this is much like not following traffic rules and one may die. Therefore, those pursuing cultivation must be extremely cautious!

Mr. Yang: Daoism's method of cultivation is contained within the "Three Crowning Flowers" and the "Five Elements of the Way" which will deliver those that are cultivated to the highest realm to become golden immortals. Will you explain these methods of cultivation?

Dao Zu: The golden immortal is the highest rank of all immortals. Those who are golden immortals will never live, die, or re-enter the cycle of reincarnation. To achieve the Three Crowning Flowers and the Five Elements of the Way takes the utmost effort. Those unable to attain this level of cultivation will not enter the highest realm of the golden immortals. I will expound on the mysterious meaning of the Three Crowning Flowers and the Five Elements of the Way as follows...

Three Crowning Flowers:

Human Flower: An energized spirit produces a healthy *qi*. People are born through the mixture of the five elements. Therefore, their spirits are the seeds of reincarnation. The mind of one cultivated must be empty and free of lesser concerns while guarding against licentious desires. The spirit should not be neglected, drained, or dwell on excesses for the flower of lead will bloom.

Earthly Flower: With healthy *qi* you will become a god. People's birth and existence relies on *qi*. Minds must not focus on food or drink and be neither frightened nor scared, not angry or resentful. This *qi* flows unimpeded and calms the soul. When this middle level *qi* is satisfied one does not dwell on food and the silver flower will bloom.

Heavenly Flower: When one becomes a god, form can be entirely ignored. If people do not believe in god, even if one's pure *qi* is developed, the body has no light and this person will have no fate. Therefore, believing in god is crucial. The upper *qi* should be empty and free of worries. It does not grasp for or touch material objects. This god does not sleep and is always pure and awake. These beings will escape this world and return to emptiness, entering the highest realms. This is when the golden flower blooms.

The Five Elements of the Way:

1. The heart holds vitality. When you are born you learn to recognize this vitality and even before you are born you already knew to follow correct social etiquette. If you feel sorrow your heart will be empty, but if you remain happy your heart will settle. This vitality is controlled by the fire *qi* of the south's Elder Fire.

2. The liver holds the *hun* soul.⁴⁷³ When you are born your soul learns how to travel and even before you are born you already knew how to be benevolent. If you feel unrestrained joy your heart will be empty, but if you remain reserved your heart will settle. This soul is controlled by the wood *qi* of the east's Elder Wood.

3. The spleen holds meaning. When you are born you learn forgotten meanings and even before you are born you already knew to be humane. If you give in to desire your heart will be empty, but if you are restrained your heart will settle. This meaning is controlled by the earth *qi* of the center's Elder Earth.

4. The lungs hold the *po* soul.⁴⁷⁴ When you are born you begin to serve this fickle soul but before you were born you already knew righteous action. If you give in to rage your heart will be empty, but if you are peaceful your heart will settle. This soul is controlled by the metal *qi* of the west's Goddess of Metal.

5. The kidney holds one's essence. When you are born this essence is muddled but before birth one has perfect knowledge. If you give in to pleasure your heart will be empty, but if you are discreet your heart will settle. This essence is controlled by the water *qi* of the north's Elder Water.

This is the teaching of the Three Crowning Flowers and the Five Elements of the Way. People's path to cultivation must cause the five elements to return to the five gods and the three flowers must transform into the three purities. This will start one on the path to their original and limitless body and they eventually attain the ultimate goal. Yet this method of cultivation is not difficult. One must protect their essence, *qi*, and vitality, abide by the principles of compassion, righteousness, and etiquette and remove all sorrow, joy, desire, rage, and pleasure. With this type of pure character, one will successfully reach the rank of golden immortal. It is also said that if one is able to cultivate their body, nourish their character, and rid their body and mind of all shortcomings, they can travel freely throughout the human realm. Even if there are thousands of rules and 10,000 regulations, one will still not be restrained and can freely ascend through the three realm, propelled by these five elements. This is actually the truth contained within the Three Crowning Flowers and the Five Elements of the Way. These Three Flowers and the Five Elements are one method to raise one's vitality and spirit. When combined into one body, this power will enable one to soar to heaven and rush around earth. Even the gods and sages will have no means of stopping you and the highest rank of golden immortal will easily be attained.

⁴⁷³ (魂) This soul is thought to travel to either paradise or hell.

⁴⁷⁴ (魄) This soul is thought to stay with the body at death.

Mr. Yang: I am very grateful for Dao Zu's instruction. I have one other question which I would like to ask. I do not know much about the cyan cow outside of the Tai Qing Palace. Can you please tell me some more about it, such as where it came from?

Dao Zu: Because you would like to know I will reveal a little! Laozi rode this cyan cow towards the west to meet the King of the Hu. This is something that most people probably know little about. This particular cow was created by the cyan essence of the east's Elder Wood. Therefore, it is called the "cyan cow." When I transformed into Laozi to fulfill the order to save all of China's sentient beings, China was just being founded as a true state and was using cattle for agriculture. Therefore, I rode a cyan cow and appeared to save the world. I transformed into Laozi to save people and rode this cyan towards the west and the Hu people, spreading the *Dao De Jing*. These 5,000 words were written for "Yi Xi" and the King of the Western Hu, the land that is now called India. Therefore, the people of India have called cows "sacred cattle." This is all because of my transformation into Laozi. Nowadays, at least half of humanity is raised on cattle. Infants drink their milk and powdered milk is used by all. Because humanity is raised on cattle, their merit gradually deteriorated. Not long after humans began drinking the milk of cows, stubborn people with bad tempers were produced. Moreover, when people descend to live on the yellow earth they started to call the "cyan cow" a "yellow cow." Thus people's minds are all different. Some are cheaters and some never break free from the cycle of rebirth. I hope that all who hear my teachings will respect the cow's gift and practice restraint while guarding the true Way. Without the cow, I would not have been carried to save the souls of many. Why does this cow have a single horn? This represents that my Way has only one correct path, not two. All of heaven and earth should follow and abide by this path.

Ji Gong: We are grateful for Dao Zu's true teachings. Because our time is short, I must guide Mr. Yang back to the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. We bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: A respectful thank you to Dao Zu for his excellent instruction. Because our time is up I must return to the temple, farewell!

Dao Zu: I hope that you two are able to return some day.

Ji Gong: If we are destined to return we will!

Dao Zu: Immortal children, please line up and accompany our guests back to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
July 29, 1979

6th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Shang Qing Palace: Teachings of Ling Bao Tian Zun.

Poem: Heavenly flowers and teachings wake up those that are lost. The purified earth leads to carefree joy and the Way. Sages and Buddhas reside comfortably in Western Heaven. Immortals and worthies in the Jade Palace listen to gem encrusted zithers.

Ji Gong: All people adore brightly colored and blooming flowers, but flowers always wither and die. As we return to view heaven, immortal females spread flowers that will bloom in each season and never wither or die. People are joyous when they have fresh air but in the dust and dirt of daily life there is barely enough oxygen to breath. Yet immediately after a rainstorm the land has a renewed freshness and the mind is clear and cool! There are two types of *qi* that can easily be distinguished. One is pure, light, and will allow people to float to heaven and one is heavy, dirty, and drags people to hell. I hope that people are able to protect their pure essence and vitality while dispelling worries and doubts. This will allow them to enter the utmost land of paradise and live forever in this tranquil land. Mr. Yang, prepare to depart. Today we will return to the palaces of heaven and go “sightseeing” again!

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! I am already sitting firmly on the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off! May I ask, when you just mentioned “sightseeing” I feel that this term is very significant. Can you please explain this word’s meaning?

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! You just mentioned the word “sightseeing” and the power within the temple was suddenly cut off, this is truly meaningful.

Mr. Yang: What caused this power outage?

Ji Gong: When your mind moves, I already know what you are thinking. In order to awaken disciples at your Phoenix hall I will explain Buddhist teachings during this fifteen-second power outage which hold great meaning. When the power just went out, I was up above looking inside this temple and I saw the adherents suddenly looking this way and that, searching for a “ray of light.” You should light some candles and place them near the sand tray so that the spirit-written characters can be clearly seen. This searching for the light can be called “sightseeing.” Therefore, “sightseeing” is not only traveling to beautiful places to look at nature’s beauty! Because science and technology is flourishing on earth, people are using their leisure time to travel and go sightseeing. Some travel within the country and some journey internationally. However, is it people’s true mind that is going sightseeing? Ha, ha! Some people travel to strip clubs and other dark places and call this “sightseeing.” I call what these people do “not-seeing.” In these contemporary times, people only want to visit the flashiest places and do not know that heaven’s sights are many times more

beautiful than those of the mortal world. Why don't people want to travel here? Today I have led Mr. Yang to this heavenly palace where we truly do not need "light" to illuminate our sightseeing trip!

Mr. Yang: I am very fortunate to be called a tourist!

Ji Gong: That is so! When you return you can lead many, many people here. This is truly like discovering a new continent for tourism.

Mr. Yang: Thank you, merciful teacher!

Ji Gong: Let us quickly move forward. Mount Ling is deep within this Buddhist paradise. If people would like to travel here all they have to do is cultivate themselves and follow the Way to achieve their goal. We have already arrived at heaven's "Shang Qing Palace" to visit Ling Bao Tian Zun. Mr. Yang, please prepare to call upon Tian Zun.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! When I am here my mind does not have a single worry and is light and pure. In front of us lies a large, four-tiered building in the shape of a cloud. Golden light is shooting out in all directions and this Jade Palace has been constructed out of both jade and gold; decorated with pearls and agate. This is not an ordinary building constructed of wood and mud. I am enchanted by this beautiful scene and I am at a loss to describe its solemnity and luxury. Heavenly flowers surround us and a dharma rain is falling on the green pines and emerald cypress. There is nothing dirty or troubling anywhere. White cranes perch in fernianas and goldfish swim in heavenly ponds. These charming sights are so enchanting that some may forget to return home. May I ask, why does the Shang Qing Palace have golden rays of light shooting out from it and revolving in all directions?

Ji Gong: These rays of light are Ling Bao Tian Zun's teachings for you. There are thirty-six techniques of the heavenly branches and seventy-two techniques of the earthly stems which are spread to every part of the three realms. Let us quickly enter the palace courts and pay our respects to Tian Zun.

Mr. Yang: The immortal children have lined up to welcome us.

Immortal Children: Welcome Ji Gong and Mr. Yang. Tian Zun bids you to enter.

Mr. Yang: Upon entering the courts, I can see an elderly man sitting on the center throne and his entire body is emitting rays of light. He has a benevolent face and just eyes and greets me smiling. ...I pay my respects to Tian Zun. I have been commanded to follow my guide through heaven and author a book about our journey. Today we have arrived at these sacred courts, please begin your instruction Tian Zun.

Tian Zun: There is no need for such formalities, please sit! Immortal children, please quickly bring our guests some heavenly, jade beverage.

Mr. Yang: We are very grateful for Tian Zun's gracious hospitality which we are reluctant to accept!

Ji Gong: Today, I have led my disciple to the Shang Qing Palace. Please pass on your teachings and instructions.

Tian Zun: Okay! You, a god and mortal, are laboring hard and diligently to save souls, spread heaven's teachings, declare Confucian teachings, teach people the Way, and save souls by increasing their own merit. Today, you have arrived here at the Shang Qing Palace and I will share my true and precious teachings with you. I reside within the Realm of Three Clarities⁴⁷⁵ and I am the master of the teaching of the Way. The world's teachings are not far from the thirty-six techniques of the heavenly branches and seventy-two techniques of the earthly stems. Yet no one on earth today can completely achieve all of the techniques found within these teachings. Because people's minds can quickly turn towards evil, if one who has attained the Way constantly commits evil actions they will not be able to heed Tian Zun's admonishments. Cultivation in Tai Shang's Way will result in the teachings and the methods of the precious spirit and save the world. Therefore, in today's discussion of salvation I will emphasize the Way, not its methods. Those who have taught and instructed often still pursue evil actions and retain undisciplined minds. Because previous teaching techniques have failed for people, I have regained sovereignty of the Shang Qing Palace. The thirty-six techniques of the heavenly branches and seventy-two techniques of the earthly stems contain just one of the teachings of the original and limitless Wu Ji. Though there are many ways to live, there is only one correct mind. Thus, today I will teach Mr. Yang this correct way and when you study these techniques you will naturally know how to employ them. I am working for the salvation and return of souls, so I will use this opportunity to explain the only method of salvation within the three realms. The six Confucian relationships are an integral part of these teachings because, "People's hearts are no longer what they once were"⁴⁷⁶ and the Way is being corrupted. I am afraid that people will follow this untrue path and take every opportunity to hurt others. Therefore, I have taken back these techniques of the Way and I have replaced them with "science and technology's ingenious methods." Thus, I have bestowed science and technology upon humankind to supplement the inadequacies of studying the Way. Today I will share my thirty-six techniques of the heavenly branches and seventy-two techniques of the earthly stems.

Thirty-six Techniques of the Heavenly Branches:

1. Creation of the universe

⁴⁷⁵ These "Three Clarities" references the three Daoist divinities, Yuan Shi Tian Zun, Ling Bao Tian Zun, and Dao De Tian Zun, the Daoist principle of longevity, which mandates a pure body, words, and mind, and the Way, which split to form the three realms of heaven, earth, and humankind.

⁴⁷⁶ This saying (人心不古) is still a common lament heard throughout Taiwan.

2. Reversal of *yin* and *yang*
3. Alteration of the stars
4. Change night to day
5. Summon wind and rain
6. Shake mountains and jolt the earth
7. Ride the mist and float on clouds
8. Turn rivers into land
9. Turn earth into golden light
10. Overflow rivers and upset the sea
11. Turn earth into metal
12. Cause the five elements to disappear
13. Strange talents
14. Foresee the future
15. Flog the mountain and move stones
16. Revive the dead
17. Flying body and erased tracks
18. Nine breath essence⁴⁷⁷
19. Guide to the original *yang* source
20. Hidden dragon, crouching tiger
21. Mend the sky and wash the sun⁴⁷⁸
22. Move mountains and fill oceans
23. Touch rocks, create gold
24. Stand without a shadow
25. Change into fetal form
26. Have everything you desire
27. Cause flowers to bloom in an instant
28. Spirit travels outside the body
29. Ability to see through thick objects
30. Magically light extinguished fire
31. Master the five thunders
32. Ability to survive underwater and under the earth
33. Flying sand, moving rock
34. Carry a mountain and stop the sea
35. Sprinkle beans and raise soldiers
36. Ability to withstand seven sword blows to head

Seventy-two Techniques of the Earthly Stems:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Travel to hell | 37. Yellow and white powers |
| 2. Expel ghosts | 38. Excellent swordsmanship |
| 3. Carry mountains | 39. Supreme archery skills |
| 4. Stop water | 40. Marching and drilling skills |
| 5. Borrow the wind | 41. Astrology talents |
| 6. Cover with fog | 42. Arrange and display troops |

⁴⁷⁷ This is the ability to stop breathing but still live.

⁴⁷⁸ This common saying refers to any great accomplishment.

7. Request sunshine
8. Request rain
9. Fire proof
10. Survive underwater
11. Conceal the sun
12. Ride the wind
13. Heat rocks to liquid
14. Spew flames
15. Swallow a knife
16. Put heaven in a teacup
17. Abilities of the gods
18. Walk on water
19. Separate a cane into many parts
20. Divide the body
21. Invisibility
22. Removable
23. Freeze someone's body
24. Exorcise evil spirits
25. Entreat the immortals
26. Expel souls
27. Summon souls
28. Summon clouds
29. Summon the moon
30. Transportation
31. Cause dreams
32. Separate and put together
33. Extend and retracting staff
34. Stop flowing water
35. Prevent disaster
36. Undo adversity

43. Clever skills
44. Blow and change occurs
45. Tough and change occurs
46. Explode a body
47. Change circumstances
48. Summon people
49. Follow a cloud
50. Call together earthly animals
51. Call together birds
52. Banish all elements
53. Super power
54. Pass through rocks
55. Body provides light
56. Do not need to eat
57. Leader
58. Swallow food
59. Open and closed
60. Leap over many mountains
61. Sprout
62. Copy text
63. Drink water
64. Stay at home when it snows
65. Violent sun
66. Producing pellets
67. Water charm
68. Healthy medicine
69. Know the time
70. Recognize the landscape
71. Cease all consumption
72. Resolution of nightmares

Similarities between ancient and contemporary are outlined below:

1. Ancient people reversed the techniques of *yin* and *yang*. Modern people have invented electric lights and darkness can be changed into daytime. This light allows people to be as busy at night as those within a night market. Daytime is no longer scarce.
2. Ancient people knew techniques which allowed them to harness the fog and clouds. Modern people ride in airplanes and are shuttled back and forth through the clouds. This is one of science and technology's advancements.
3. Ancient people learned techniques to alter the location of stars. Today, people can change their hearts or exchange their kidneys. People can also use the five major internal organs of dogs and monkeys for transplant. This is just like the ability to change the location of stars.

4. Ancient people studied techniques which allowed them to harness the five elements. This means that they controlled metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Today, water has been overcome through the invention of the submarine. Machines that spurt metal have been invented and the earth has been infiltrated through its caves. Of the five elements, these three have been controlled.

5. Ancient people knew techniques for divining the future. Modern people have invented radar, which as a military weapon can warn of approaching enemy warships. Radar can also detect approaching typhoons and other changing weather. Science can divine what will occur in the future.

6. Ancient people knew techniques that could allow their bodies to fly through the air. Modern people travel in planes and on trains; instantly conveyed to different areas.

7. Ancient people knew techniques to move mountains and fill the sea. Modern people can use explosives or drilling machines and bulldozers to push mountains into the sea.

8. Ancient people knew the hidden dragon, crouching tiger technique. Modern people use the electric whip and can also tame the dragon and hide the tiger.

9. Ancient people mastered the technique of five thunders. Modern people can use a computer to control – with a touch of their finger – the detonation of explosives. This will similarly produce a deafening roar, just like the technique of five thunders.

10. Ancient people had techniques for hearing and seeing from a distance. Modern people have television transmitters and can see images over thousands of miles which is called “seeing 1,000 miles.”⁴⁷⁹ The telephone is used for communication and voices can be heard from over 10,000 miles away. This is called “hearing from afar.”⁴⁸⁰

11. Ancient people knew the turning sprinkled beans into soldiers technique.⁴⁸¹ Modern people can produce many explosives. When these bombs explode into space it is much like the scattering of beans, yet the people that these explosions kill is limitless.

Above is a brief description of the thirty-six techniques of the heavenly branches and their similarities between ancient and modern practices.

The Seventy-two Earthly Stems and their Modern Examples:

1. Use of the wind...air conditioning, electric fans
2. Cover with fog...dry ice
3. Summon rain...man-made rain

⁴⁷⁹ The characters employed here are 千里眼, the name of a protector deity for Guanyin.

⁴⁸⁰ The characters here are 順風耳, the name of a protector deity for Guanyin.

⁴⁸¹ This common saying now means, “To work miracles.”

4. Survive under water...scuba divers
5. Walk on water...water skiing, ice skating
6. Entreat the immortals...spirit-writing
7. Select the month (remove time restrictions)...photographic projection
8. Carry something...elevator, freight and postal transport
9. Stop water...building dikes, constructing embankments
10. Clever skills...plastic, make-up
11. Control of shadows...movies, television
12. Beckon to come, tell to go...remote control
13. Super power...excavator, robots
14. Penetrate rocks...electric drills
15. Body produce light...batteries, lights
16. Healing drugs...Chinese and Western medicine combined with technology
17. Knowledge of time...watch, clock
18. Knowledge of the land...map, index

This is a brief outline of the seventy-two earthly stems and the similarities between ancient and modern techniques. The thirty-six techniques of the heavenly branches and seventy-two techniques of the earthly stems are both good and evil. Each technique has been reincarnated again on earth in the form of 108 scientists.⁴⁸² If these techniques are used for just causes they can create blessings for mankind. Yet if these techniques are used for evil they can greatly harm mankind. For example, explosives can be used to clear mountains and create roads, which will bring people limitless happiness. Yet if these same explosives are used to kill people, the suffering dealt to mankind will be vast. Modern scientific and technological advancements have produced more powerful weapons with which to harm people; including atomic, hydrogen, and nuclear bombs. These actions move people's spirits to be continually reincarnated and stay in this human realm. Humankind must recognize that, "People's hearts are not what they once were" and that there is much evil in this world. Even though people's lives are now comfortable and blessed, this modern life lasts only an instant. This is not because heaven is not merciful, but because people possess evil natures and proclivities. Therefore, I hope that all people listen to my teachings and quickly discard their murderous intentions. Only then will the explosion of humankind, individual destruction, and other worldly disasters be avoided. If people are able to foster kind hearts and a peaceful environment this world's scientific and technological advancements would turn the human realm into a world much like heaven. People could travel freely throughout this world, coming and going with plenty to eat and wear. This mortal life would be similar to that of the lives of the Buddhas, gods, and immortals. This is heaven's method of "universal salvation."

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for Tian Zun's teachings. Listening to Tian Zun speak is equivalent to ten years of study. To think that the present state and future state of the world is all miraculously arranged by Tian Zun is truly staggering.

⁴⁸² These 108 techniques were similarly incarnated as the 108 characters of the novel *All Men are Brothers*.

Ji Gong: Amazing, amazing! We must bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: Farewell, Tian Zun!

Tian Zun: I will command my immortal children to line up and accompany your return.

Immortal Children: We will accompany these two back to their temple.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Tian Zun and Immortal Children. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please Master, you can take off now.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
August 15, 1979

7th Journey: Travel to and listen at the River of Three Clarities: Teachings of Elder He Shang.

Poem: The three clarities and the four correct techniques lead the spirit. The five elements of the Way return to their origin and form the Dao De Jing. Fire and water can both return to the heavenly realm. The cultivated mind and refined character will ascend to heaven.

Ji Gong: The “Three Clarities” are the Jade Clarity, Highest Clarity, and the Ultra Clarity. They are also called Heavenly Clarity, Earthly Clarity, and Human Clarity. The *Dao De Jing* explains, “Heaven must be pure, earth must be tranquil, people must be sages.” Therefore, you should be aware that the Three Clarities are part of the Way. Today, I have again guided the spirit of my worthy disciple to view this realm of Three Clarities and hear its ruler’s teachings. The Three Clarities are the origin and beginning of all that is sacred. Daoist teachings are limitless. Therefore, those mortals that study the Way and would like to write charms must first draw the Three Clarities at the top of each charm. The four “corrects” are the correct body, correct mind, correct words, and correct actions. People must guard these four corrects while pursuing the Way. Only then will the four corrects serve as a staircase of clouds to heaven. Those people studying the Way must also write the character “*gan*” on each charm. The meaning of this character is that body, mind, words, and actions are all correct. This charm is very powerful. To be correct one should also draw the correct forms at the bottom of the charm. The spirit’s power is illustrious and profound which is something that most people do not know. I do not want to say too much about the mysterious use of charms. In a moment, I will ask the Ling Bao Tian Zun to say more about this. Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform and prepare to journey to haven so you can continue to write your book.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! Please take off teacher...

Ji Gong: While sitting aboard the lotus flower platform you should open your mind. Humanity swims in the Sea of Bitterness and extreme joy begets calamity. On what day will extravagant fantasies arrive? Peng Lai Island in the Yellow Sea has established phoenix societies. Immortals and Buddhas descend and expound theories of Buddhism and Daoism. Do not focus all your attention on this marvelous sight and remember your task of saving souls.

Mr. Yang: Teacher, these verses carry lots of meaning!

Ji Gong: My words are few, but the meaning is great. With shallow water one can catch big fish with relatively less effort. How is this not joyful?

Mr. Yang: Aren't all the fish that live in shallow water small? Teacher, aren't you being too stingy with secrets that contain deeper meaning?

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! If you use a small fishing pole to catch big fish I am afraid that you won't catch anything and you may be dragged into the sea. Therefore, if the water is too deep the fish are too heavy and you will never catch anything.

Mr. Yang: These words are very meaningful. Ah, why is there suddenly a vast river up above? The water is crystal clear and it looks like the river splits into three braches.

Ji Gong: This is the "River of Three Clarities" and because it lies in thirty-three heavenly districts is also called the "Heavenly River." This is the upper section of the river, thus its waters are brilliant and clear. We flew over this area on previous trips, which is why you have not yet seen this location. It is only on our trip today that we have stopped to inspect this area.

Mr. Yang: This river is blocking our way. How will we pass through?

Ji Gong: The lotus flower platform has grown out of mud but is not dirtied. Today, as we travel on the lotus flower platform I am afraid that it will not be easy to pass over the River of Three Clarities. This is because the lotus flower platform comes from and enjoys muddy water. Therefore, I am worried that it will not be able to adapt to the clear water of the River of Three Clarities.

Mr. Yang: What do you mean?

Ji Gong: It has not been cultivated in this type of environment. The lotus flower is best at absorbing mud and filth and growing into a beautiful and pure flower. Today, the water of the River of Three Clarities is so clear that you can see all the way to the bottom. This water is thus not suitable for the lotus flower.

Mr. Yang: I still don't understand your logic. The lotus flower is pure and pristine yet cannot adapt to an environment with clean and clear water?

Ji Gong: What do you not understand? The lotus flower serves as a metaphor for immortals and Buddhas. In order to become an immortal or Buddha, these beings must attempt to save all of mankind. Yet the souls which they are charged with rescuing reside in a muddy and filthy environment of wine, women, wealth, desire, and vanity all mixed together. Immortals and Buddhas must harness the barge of mercy to save them. Therefore, just as the lotus flower lives in filth and mud, immortals and Buddhas live in this mortal world to save souls. If they fail to save sentient beings how could they be called immortals and Buddhas? When they fail to save souls, immortals and Buddhas are then called "sentient beings." Therefore, as the lotus flower travels through this confusing and filthy world it still tries to protect its pure and pristine nature. If it did not do so, the lotus flower would absorb all the mud and filth and

perish. Would the flower then be able to grow its emerald green leaves and its pure, white flowers? Yet conversely, if the world becomes as pure as the River of Three Clarities, the lotus flower will have no filth from whence to emerge and will wither and die. If mortals possess a pure spirit they only need walk on the surface of the River of Three Clarities and they will find that it is as firm to them as the earth. They will smoothly traverse along its surface and receive a transformed body that is as pure as the lotus flower. Those who are able to traverse this River of Three Clarities will become sages.

Mr. Yang: What you have said makes sense!

Ji Gong: This heavenly Three Clarities water flows down from the Kunlun Mountains⁴⁸³ to the mortal world and becomes the muddied water of the Yellow River. There is a common saying, “On the day that the Yellow River runs clear, sages will emerge.” If the direction and flow of the River of Three Clarities continues towards the mortal world, some of the gods and sages from this heavenly realm will be washed downstream to the human realm for reincarnation.

Mr. Yang: An old man has suddenly appeared before us walking on the water. Who is this?

Ji Gong: This is Elder He Shang! Mr. Yang, quickly walk forward on the water to pay your respects.

Mr. Yang: A respectful greeting to Elder He Shang!

Elder He Shang: There is no need for such formalities! Uh, oh! A mortal has come to visit this heavenly river. I wonder, is this an illegal immigrant?

Mr. Yang: I wouldn’t dare! I have come here with my teacher because I was commanded to travel to heaven and author a book. Today we have come to this location to hear your teachings. How would I dare sneak in?

Elder He Shang: So you are not an illegal immigrant. Actually, I was not really worried that you snuck here because if your footsteps were not pure, with one step on the River of Three Clarities you would have immediately sunk to the bottom and disappeared forever. I wish to assist you to the opposite shore, what do you think about this?

Mr. Yang: Thank you, I am certainly in need! Elder He Shang, please provide us with a boat to cross.

Elder He Shang: Okay! I remember an emperor during the Han Dynasty. He was respectful, thrifty, benevolent, and pious. He was also cultivated, taciturn, and

⁴⁸³ The Kunlun Mountains are located between Tibet and Xinjiang.

meditative; diligently reading the *Dao De Jing* day and night. Yet he could not understand the meaning contained in this scripture so I transformed myself and descended to the mortal world. I found an abode near the river and named myself “Elder of the Upper River.” After learning that I knew about the Way, he sent emissaries to learn and explain to him the difficult sections of the *Dao De Jing*. I said to these emissaries, “The Way is esteemed and precious. One should not dispatch people to ask about it but inquire after it themselves.” The emissaries returned and reported what I had said to the emperor. The emperor came himself and kneeled before me yet I kept my eyes shut and sat in a meditative pose, remaining undisturbed by his presence. The emperor was not pleased and he thought to himself, “Though this master understands the Way, he is still one of my subjects. How can he be so haughty?” I knew what the emperor was thinking and I leapt to my feet, shooting through the roof of my humble abode and flying hundreds of feet into the sky. I descended and said, “Now I am neither in heaven nor earth. How am I one of your subjects?” There was a noise like a large bell and thunder shook heaven and earth. After hearing this, the emperor immediately understood who I was and felt regret. He bowed before me and asked me to forgive his mistake. I felt that he was truly sincere and I returned again to the mortal world to save him. Therefore, I have moved all mortals seeking the Way to open their hearts and accept my teachings. If it was not so, these people would never be able to meet the immortals. Today, Mr. Yang has arrived here and I will also save him. Please feel your own feet, are they dirty?

Mr. Yang: I am ashamed but they are still dirty!

Elder He Shang: I will not let you wash your filthy feet in this river. You need to come back to the water of the River of Three Clarities but you should go to the Yellow River and wash there first!

Mr. Yang: If I went down to the dirty Yellow River wouldn't it be even more difficult to wash my feet clean?

Elder He Shang: If you don't go to the Yellow River you will never cross the River of Three Clarities. But if you do, you will have the opportunity to see what is on the other side.

Ji Gong: Disciple, I will impart one technique! If you smear oil on your feet you will quickly rid your feet of all filth. Isn't this better than traveling to the Yellow River?

Elder He Shang: Oil always rises to the surface when mixed with water. This truly is a miraculous technique yet one should take care to apply clean and pure oil. Otherwise, I am afraid that you will not be able to wash all the filth off and be left behind. Ji Gong, you are very clever.

Mr. Yang: I will smear on oil before proceeding forward.

Ji Gong: Elder He Shang, explain the miraculous uses of heavenly water!

Elder He Shang: Okay! The miraculous use of the water of the River of Three Clarities is something that no one on earth knows. If you recall, the grand primordium of essence that created this universe split into three sections called the “Three Clarities.” Likewise, this river is the origin of all water on earth. The properties of semen are much like water. When people are born it is through the essence of both the father and the mother that pregnancy occurs. The father is Elder Wood and the mother is the Goddess of Metal. Passion is supplied by Elder Fire and semen is made possible by Elder Water. Elder Earth is the matchmaker and thus people were created. When this heavenly water flows down to the mortal world out of the Kunlun Mountains and forms the Yellow River, its waters travel over four continents and Elder Earth has hollowed out underground passages so that it can moisten the land in many areas. The transformative nature of water imparts its *yang* nature to tadpoles, which are initially *yin* creatures, and causes them to turn into frogs. The creation of humans follows this principle. People were created through the mixture of both *yin* and *yang*, feminine and masculine. Therefore, pupae can cocoon and transform into butterflies, tadpoles can change into frogs, and seeds can grow into grasses and trees. The birth of all living things originates from the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Therefore, we say that the five elements have created people and all living things. We could also discuss the five elements using scientific instruments to prove my claims so that you would know that everything I have told you is true. Those people who pursue cultivation must first cast off the essence of the five elements, like uprooting sprouts from seeds. Thus all living beings would cease to be born or die and return to Wu Ji’s ball of essence in space. If these sprouts are not uprooted they will become the seeds of reincarnation for life upon life and death upon death. This is like a seed that grows into a plant that produces seeds which again grow into plants. One becomes two, two becomes three, three becomes four, four becomes five and they quickly disperse everywhere. People’s desirous thoughts sprout and these are the seeds of reincarnation. Therefore it has been said, “Desire arises and extends the cycle of birth and death. To think about life gives birth to reincarnation.” These seeds can be planted in China, in the United States, in India, in Africa, or any nation. But because the essence of each of the five elements is different and the climates around the world vary, these seeds produce different forms and shapes. Therefore, in our modern world people have different types of dispositions and come in different colors. Those modern people pursuing cultivation must disregard slight differences in appearance and search for their “roots.” All living beings are just seeds cast down to earth by the Original Being. Thus the cultivated must follow the five directions to the Three Clarities and then to its source, the original ball of essence. In doing so, they will pass by the River of Three Clarities, return to the source, and reunite with the supreme powers. To overcome the three realms one must practice restraint and a carefree existence will be obtained. God has the ability to create all things and these are the miracles of heaven. How can humans learn of this and not show respect?

Ji Gong: We are grateful to Elder He Shang for sharing these heavenly secrets.

Mr. Yang: There is a younger looking immortal approaching. He is traveling over the river without a boat. Is it permissible to approach him to inquire after the secrets of the immortals?

Elder He Shang: He is Master Qing Yun. Where are you coming from, kind sir?

Master Qing Yun: I am coming from the Shang Qing Palace where I am a disciple of the Ling Bao Tian Zun. Today, in an impulsive moment, I decided to visit the River of Three Clarities because I knew that Ji Gong and Mr. Yang would be here. A moment ago, Elder He Shang related to you the origination of the River of Three Clarities. In order to assist in the saving of souls, I decided to pay a special visit to Mr. Yang. When people follow the path to cultivation they often begin with noble intentions but are not resolute. These souls do not take religious prohibitions seriously and forgive themselves for their constant mistakes. Yet these people quickly find themselves in circumstances from which there is no salvation. In order to save all sentient beings, God has leaked these secrets of the immortals. Today I will explain three steps to cultivation which, if followed sincerely, will ensure that mankind can successfully cross the River of Three Clarities.

1. Heavenly Qing: People's heads are regarded as heaven. The mysteries and depths of the soul must be controlled. Evil thoughts should be expelled and desires should be rejected. The wisdom within the soul is clear and bright and those that understand its secrets will communicate with heaven. If one can reject these evil thoughts, the true soul will rise to heaven and this is called the "Heavenly Qing."

2. Earthly Qing: People's mid-sections are regarded as earth. The spleen and stomach belong to the earth and you should eat several types of rice and grains to keep the organs in good health. One should stop eating meat and fish is unhealthy. For the intestines to be clean, they must be devoid of this rotten flesh. If one is able to reject unclean foods their stomachs will cease to be an unclean atmosphere and will be a clean environment. When the soul returns to this purified state the gods will return and this is called "Earthly Qing."

3. Human Qing: People's lower extremities are called human. Males and females' affection and desires move them and they must release their essence. This relationship outside the bonds of marriage is called "licentious evil" and it introduces chaos to the realms of *yin* and *yang*. If the human essence is dispersed rashly and excessively it inverts the natural course and destroying this seed is just like killing living spirits. This essence also mixes with the water of this river and dirties it. Those who are lewd and licentious have said, "Only envy lovebirds do not envy the immortals."⁴⁸⁴ Purify your mind so that the spirits will descend and the evil and lewd demons will depart. People's lewd natures are as deeply ingrained as the bottom of the sea. The filth inside us comes together and is drained in one location. Those with licentious desires must

⁴⁸⁴ This is because lovebirds always have a companion while the immortals live solitary lives.

push them away. These souls will naturally sink to the bottom of the great sea and be imprisoned in the *yin* realm of hell. Yet, if souls expel their licentious desires and pursue virtue they will wipe away the Sea of Bitterness and convert it to an ocean of the Way. When people desire the utmost purity, heavenly principles flow and through rejecting evil people will naturally accept the Way and return to heaven. When the cultivated people of this world all possess this wisdom and not a single person has lewd desires, no one will sink again into low places and filth. Therefore, if after death people follow this muddy and confusing course or indulge in the river of passion they will be imprisoned in hell whereas if they lead people to pursue the Way they will never again be reincarnated.

Today, I have directed you to save souls and assist the righteous through expelling licentiousness and preserving purity. These people's bodies have three sections: upper, middle, and lower which in un-hindered by the Three Clarities and will test their ability to pass the River of Three Clarities. By thus verifying their merit, people can return to the sacred realm of Three Clarities. Otherwise, even if people have amassed great amounts of merit they will forget that upon death their soul must rely on assistance from the immortals and Buddhas of heaven, who will light their way, add pressure to refine their souls, and ensure that their minds and natures are sincere and faithful. These souls will then be able to rise to heaven and desire to enlighten all beings still on earth.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for Master Qing Yun's beautiful words. Each sentence sounded like gold or jade and your words were moving and useful.

Ji Gong: Our time is short and I must return my disciple to his temple. We bid you both farewell.

Elder He Shang: There is no need to be so polite, good-bye!

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform, please teacher take off.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
September 7, 1979

8th Journey: Return to and listen at the Shang Qing Palace: Teachings of Ling Bao Tian Zun

Poem: *The wonderful scenery of the halls of heaven is different than the mortal realm. This unique environment is always here. Doors do not need to be closed because there are no thieves⁴⁸⁵. Immortals and sages knock at the gate of Chan Buddhism.*

Ji Gong: Material comforts enhance mortal life and people live in massive skyscrapers, yet walls of iron and steel trap individuals within. Though bandits cannot enter, there is still no way that the “soul” can be closed to the constant sneak attacks of the bandits of passion and anxiety! Look at each of heaven’s towers in the sky. None of the gates are shut, yet bandits do not enter and no one is disturbed. Thus the mind here is settled and the soul is at rest. People can come and go as they please. This is a carefree lifestyle, do you envy it? You are welcome to come! There is no need to be polite! Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform. Today we will again visit the Shang Qing Palace and pay our respects to Ling Bao Tian Zun.

Mr. Yang: Okay! I am already sitting on the lotus flower platform, please teacher take off.

Ji Gong: ... We have already arrived at the Shang Qing Palace. Mr. Yang, get off the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: We arrived here in an instant and the Shang Qing Palace floats before us. Light from the 35 Heavenly Stems and the 72 Earthly Roots are constantly revolving which causes me to feel a little dizzy.

Ji Gong: Your spirit should be composed and you should not panic.

Mr. Yang: Yes, yes! My mind has begun to steady, let us go visit Ling Bao Tian Zun.

Tian Zun: There is no need to be so polite! You two are both very welcome on this return trip to the Shang Qing Palace. Because time was so short during your previous visit I was only able to discuss a brief outline and provide scanty proof of the 36 Heavenly Stems and the 72 Earthly Roots. I have not yet expounded other techniques and today we will discuss the Great Way of the precious spirit. In order to save mortals I will lead you both to an adjoining palace’s court to look around.

Mr. Yang: We are very grateful, Tian Zun! We have arrived at this large, side court but I only see one large book with the glowing gold letters, “Precious Spirit of the Original Form.” What does this mean?

⁴⁸⁵ This is a typical Confucian statement.

Tian Zun: If you wait but a moment all will be known.

Mr. Yang: Upon entering this court it is completely empty and transparent like smooth crystal glass and light travels everywhere, just as it does in space.

Tian Zun: Your spiritual eyes are not yet clear. I will point out how to remove obstructions so that all will appear clear.

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun stands in front of me and wipes away all the filth and immediately the scene before me changes completely. I can only see a single speck of white light hovering before my eyes. This pearl of light is magnificent and seems to be revolving at a great rate, yet I am unsure of its nature.

Tian Zun: Ha, ha! This is people's original spirit. Heaven's efficacious spirit, earth's efficacious spirit, and people's efficacious spirit must come together to form this essence or all will be destroyed. It will then rise to heaven, fall to earth, and collapse upon people. The true spirit is precious and worthy, thus we call it the "precious spirit." Heaven's sun, moon, and stars; earth's water, fire, and wind; human's vitality, essence, and spirit, are all combined to form this precious soul. Therefore, I have directed the first teachings of great heaven and used the techniques of Tai Shang Lao Jun. Those people who wish to use these teachings must first worship and investigate the Three Clarities and people's methods. Those who seek this spirit must gather together vitality. Those with heaven's assistance, earth's stability, and people's methods are able to obtain this spirit. When observing heaven and earth's calamities how are people to obtain peace? Therefore, the means to save souls is found within the soul's precious honesty and eagerness. The Three Clarities lead to the Four Corrects and if achieved, one will have a perfect understanding heaven and earth, spirit and soul. The miraculous technique of charms resides within the "gallbladder." A large gallbladder means great strength in technique, a small gallbladder means feeble technique, and no gallbladder means that one has no skill in technique.

Mr. Yang: Can we teach these gallbladder charm techniques to others?

Tian Zun: Ha, ha! There is no need. Just use your mind and settle your gallbladder. These charms arise from a filial mind and a righteous gallbladder. A large gallbladder encompasses heaven and this miraculous method knows no limits.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. The mind's techniques actually have many miraculous uses.

Tian Zun: Those on the path to cultivation generally fail to act as they preach. Some studying these techniques are haughty and egotistical, believing that only they can hear heaven. Moreover, others are envious, encourage strife, or commit murder. These actions are very disruptive and not techniques of restraint. Rebellion is another powerful technique that viciously harms people. Those who violate their ancestors or

master's teachings, upon death, must descend to hell and receive bitter, inescapable punishments or be reborn as an animal, creature of the sea, or as an inanimate object and receive retribution. So that one is able to practice techniques of restraint and save other souls all should follow these ten guidelines:

1. Do not kill...avoid desires or appetites
2. Do not commit adultery...avoid adulterous women
3. Do not steal...avoid unrighteous wealth
4. Do not deceive...avoid deceptive speech
5. Do not drink to excess...avoid unreasonable actions
6. Enjoy many relationships among extended family and friends
7. Your heart is moved to joy when you see people commit good deeds
8. Commit helpful acts when one sees others' sorrow
9. Have evil visited upon you and do not retaliate
10. Do not hear that others have not heard about the Way and reject it yourself

Those able to follow these ten precious rules will certainly be successful in their path to cultivation. Those studying these techniques will all be assured success. Today's auspicious date for saving souls necessitates that sentient beings listen to and cultivate themselves according to the Way. Otherwise, they will lose this auspicious opportunity and regret it forever.

I praise bravery with this poem: The underworld examines all of one's idle days; the sound of suffering is often heard day and night. This is because one failed to perform virtuous deeds in their previous lives; after death they are dragged to the City of Iron. The ox-head demons have no emotions; how are these prison guards able to perform compassionate acts? Hot iron pellets appease the prisoner's hunger; copper birds peck at their eyes. Creditors harm one's family innumerable times; the repayment for one's debts is clearly understood. While alive one is not willing to hold the three treasures dear; how are they able to avoid imprisonment in hell? As soon as one falls into this prison of endless night; they will be kept out of the cycle of rebirth for one thousand years. They will lie on an iron bed which is like fire day and night; the trees have branches like swords which are always present. Sentient beings and hungry ghosts cry and moan; they detest their prison guards and the ox-head demons. Knife Mountain is cold and harms one's hands and feet; the stoves are cruelly hot and unbearable. One undergoes 18,000 misfortunes without the return of day; if they are released it is to be re-born in the body of a dog or swine. Some people are not willing to travel the more convenient path; what type of fate or virtue causes one to become a ghost? This is the district of three roads and eight difficulties; the anger from worry, sorrow, and suffering can be explained to whom? One thinks the body is a void fantasy; the body and its organs are not real. Bones are broken into 360 pieces; skin and flesh become a body of pus and blood. One often think that this is not a permanent residence; from morning until evening the mind and spirit are worried and chaotic. The authority of father, mother, and wife were entrusted to you; brothers and sisters lack the time to perform good deeds. Your *qi* is broken and returns to emptiness; one hundred bones

rot and return at last to dust. Even if there were males and females weeping before you; it would be difficult to save them from sinking below and perishing. Every person should diligently cultivate themselves and turns towards virtue today; cautiously leave wealth to one's descendants.

Ji Gong: Tian Zun's magnanimous words command that Mr. Yang listen compassionately from his heart and he now cries uncontrollably. I believe that all mortals who hear Tian Zun's thoughtful exhortations, if flesh and blood, will feel touched! Regarding this, can those who follow the path to cultivation later in life still ascend to heaven?

Tian Zun: I will lead Mr. Yang to discover the origin of his soul.

Mr. Yang: Actually, the bright speck of light before my eyes has already disappeared.

Tian Zun: Your mind also holds a "Ling Bao Tian Zun." People's "original spirit" is actually this heavenly noble "Tian Zun." Thus I have said, "Many teachings originate from the mind." When people come across hardships and crises they must come up with a resolution. Therefore it is said, "Teachings are born from the mind." When the mind is upright, teachings are upright and this can protect one following the Way. When the mind is evil, teachings are evil and this can harm people's virtue. Mortals who pursue these teachings often never obtain them and those that seek the Way often fail to find it. It has been said, "When the Way stands tall, dragons and tigers hide. When virtue is abundant, ghosts and spirits stand in admiration." These sayings are metaphors for having obtained the Way. Thus I exhort mortals, all who are not cultivated or searching for the Way should quickly gain great ability in magical charms. Even if these people had no knowledge of techniques or charms, if they are great people, they will naturally gain protection and safety. This is a technique of protection. Studying the Way is also like this. You only need a worthy mind for cultivation, to endure the tests of demons, to increase your merit every day, and adequate heat and fire for demons to naturally depart from around your body and return to the fires from whence they came!

Mr. Yang: Could you say that "fire guides one to the original spirit"?

Tian Zun: Cultivation is like a hot furnace from which steam escapes and returns to the atmosphere. If one's mind is not wise and worthy, the fire will cool like the temperature drop induced by an air conditioner. In order to save sentient beings I have especially sought out this stage to share my "Scripture of the Precious Spirit's Temple" with the world.

Ji Gong: We are grateful for Tian Zun's teachings. Mr. Yang, carefully observe and listen.

Mr. Yang: Yes! I will observe and listen to Tian Zun's teachings.

Scripture of the Precious Spirit's Temple

The man that desires cultivation must first be able to reject all material forms.

- Explanation: The process of cultivating one's mind is called cultivation. Materiality must be rejected and then the mind will be calm. People should have undisturbed minds.

- Explanation: The six senses are involved in materiality one must keep their distance from these matters. The six senses: desire, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and technique should not seek material form and this is called complete refusal. People's minds should not be preoccupied with materiality and they will thus avoid trouble. This is said to be an undisturbed mind.

One should then sit peacefully and observe within as the mind arises. If you feel a desire arise it must be rejected and destroyed to preserve peace and tranquility.

- Explanation: All worries must be dispelled so that only tranquility remains. Intelligent minds know themselves and this is called internal observation. If one's senses arise before they are dispelled, this is called the arising mind. Thoughts often suddenly arise and afterwards they are followed by feelings. When the senses are controlled, the mind is completely clear and when the senses do not arise this is called peace. When feelings or emotions are not stirred this is called tranquility, peace, or serenity.

Covetous and shallow thoughts must then all be destroyed and dispelled.

- Explanation: The senses should not arise and all distracting thoughts should be forgotten. Without false thoughts, desires do not arise and envy will not be present. Thus this is called to destroy and dispel.

One must be diligent day and night and not cease for a moment.

- Explanation: The day is light and the night is dark. Light and dark should be forgotten and one should diligently pursue cultivation day and night without rest. Thus this is called unceasing.

Whoever destroys the six senses does not destroy a reflective mind.

- Explanation: An active mind is one that holds harmful thoughts, irregardless of how many. When emotions arise they should be rejected and this is called destruction. Intelligent reflection should always occur and this needs no space of emptiness. Thus, one cannot destroy the ability of the mind to reflect.

One should control the impotent mind, do not control the mind in concentration.

- Explanation: To have complete focus is called concentration. A mind that wanders is called an impotent mind. One can allow for natural thoughts and this is called not controlling the mind.

Do not rely on only one teaching or the mind will never be moved.

- Explanation: If one chooses a single teaching it is called a single method. The mind should study the meaning behind teachings. It should comprehend the spirit, not just the letter of the law.

Thus the average mind is rash and even with preliminary study, stopping the mind from arising is extremely difficult or impossible. Even if the mind halts temporarily one often still fails.

- Explanation: Even though the worrisome habits and acquired characteristics of speech can be destroyed or discarded, those on the preliminary path to cultivation and the Way are not fully prepared. Discarding thoughts is extremely difficult and though one's merit can be used to momentarily stop the mind, these methods will fail.

To stop or continue is a difficult choice, one struggles with the dialectics of an evil mind.

- Explanation: An evil mind arises from needs and one's environment. An evil mind and its environment are mutually influential. Thoughts of desire and thoughts of the Way struggle against each other and thus this is called waging war. The evil senses never stop and the evil within can be destroyed one hundred times and still arise.

Focused thoughts held for a long time will lead to successful results. One cannot stop if results are not quick in coming as this will waste the work of a thousand lives.

- Explanation: If the settled mind arises, all that is true will be missed. If even a single evil thought is accepted, a thousand lives' work towards the Way is wasted. Cultivation is like cooking food. If the duration and degree of heat is not constant and one does not add salt and sugar the flavor will not be correct. The heat cannot be interrupted and must cook the food through to obtain a delicious taste. Otherwise, one will give oneself up and lose one thousand lives and be the recipient of ten thousand disasters.

The young are pure.

- Explanation: The young are pure and peaceful. True intelligence has not yet arisen. Thus it is said that the young are pure.

One can progress while walking, standing, sitting, or resting.

- Explanation: Whether one is walking, standing, sitting, or resting these are four actions one should perform while properly collected.

While wading through daily affairs one is in a noisy place.

- Explanation: When viewing all things one's mind collects filth. When everything arises within one's mind it is called a noisy place.

All actions are either chaotic or peaceful.

- Explanation: When desires are chaotic these are called self-defeating thoughts. When one is completely at peace, this is called tranquility.

There are affairs and there are no affairs but this should not be pondered often.

Regions are tranquil and noisy; the difference only depends on one's state of mind.

- Explanation: Whether you have possessions or not is inconsequential. If you are lonely or popular matters not. All matter is indistinguishable and is called one.

If the mind is wound up and too anxious this will certainly produce illness. This leads to a chaotic *qi* and unbalanced condition.

- When one is too eager for gain this is called a lack of restraint and this mind will manifest its chaotic nature. When one is pursuing cultivation you cannot be too wound up or you will become ill.

The mind moves slowly and quickly. One must continue to learn without being overly anxious or too reserved.

- Explanation: From the settled mind emits intelligence and this is called continuing. While pursuing the Way to a cultivated mind one must find a suitable speed of action.

The self should always be suitable.

- If one is too reserved they will be a simpleton and if one is too anxious they will become unbalanced. When one is balanced this is called being suitable.

Control yourself but do not stop. Express yourself but do not be too active. Though the outside world is noisy, when wading through daily affairs one should not become aroused.

- Explanation: Silence is often noisy, noise is often silent. Tranquility is often chaotic, chaos is often tranquil. Those who obtain the original silence are truly settled.

Though one can handle many affairs without becoming angry does not mean that one should ask for more affairs.

- Explanation: Evil habits must always be controlled and one cannot let up for an instant without more trouble arising.

Avoiding these daily affairs will take one to the true mansion. All affairs should be resolved.

- Explanation: Because one's original nature is empty and silent, without noise or worries, this is one's true mansion. Intelligence should be used without limit to resolve problems and this is called resolution.

If water is calm it can serve as a mirror that reflects appearance and form.

- Explanation: The original mind is clean and pure, just like calm water that reflects all things without obstruction and is called appearance and form.

All teachings lend assistance and one is able to become calm.

- Explanation: All teachings have an empty nature. Loneliness does not arise and this is called to become calm.

Intelligence emits slowly and quickly and differs from person to person. Anxiousness encourages a wounded nature and this will not lead towards intelligence.

- Explanation: To anxiously ask for knowledge and sight will cause even the truly settled to forget. When one covets all forms the mind will harm itself. Therefore, it is said that this is not wisdom. When one naturally uses the substance of the Way, intelligence will naturally arise.

If one is settled and does not ask for wisdom, wisdom will naturally arise and this is called true wisdom.

- Explanation: The mind's substance is quiet and pure and its miraculous uses are not few. That which it emits is true wisdom.

Intelligence is not used and those with actual wisdom are considered foolish.

- Explanation: Intelligence contains no distinctions and those on the path to cultivation appear foolish but are very wise and heading home.

Increased profits, settled intelligence; increased perfection without limit.

- Explanation: Quiet reflection and complete integration encourages peace. Thus it is said: "Increased perfection is without limit."

If the settled mind focuses on lesser thoughts one will feel evil. The evil essence of one hundred demons follows the mind's desires.

- Explanation: If one uses the cultivated mind to ask for all, all must arise. All evil demons will compete to come and cause chaos.

To view all of Tian Zun's immortals and sages is his auspicious fortune.

- If one sees Tian Zun's immortals, sages, and gods they should consider this an auspicious fortune but they cannot choose when these beings will be manifest.

One is only commanded to settle the mind above, there will be no defeat. Below the settled mind vastness is without foundation.

- Explanation: Former lives do not occur and this is called undefeated. In the next life one will not arise and this is called without foundation.

Past practices are cancelled daily, new practices are not created.

- Explanation: Old habits are not limited and past practices are cancelled daily. The more the mind does not arise it is said that new practices are not created.

Without any obstructions, abandon this filthy cage.

- Everything is not caught and is thus called large obstructions. To free oneself from worldly cares means to sever all connections and is thus said to be abandoning this filthy cage.

Through practice and persistence, one will naturally attain the Way.

- Explanation: Wisdom's reflections are not destroyed and this is called practice and persistence. This is in accordance with the truth and is thus said to be the attainment of the Way.

Those who attain the Way often pass through seven forms.

- Explanation: Those who attain the Way have minds that currently follow seven stages.

The first has a mind that must be settled. It is easy to feel that all filth and desires are washed away.

- Explanation: When the mind obtains purity, filthy thoughts are expelled. Thus it is called feeling that all filth has been washed away.

The second dwells in disease that is annulled. The body and mind are clear and refreshed.

- Explanation: The true essence comes together when the cycle of reincarnation is stopped. Incurable, chronic diseases are completely healed. The body's Way is joined in truth and this body is carefree and young.

The third fills what is vacant and is prematurely harmed. Turn back the years and restore life.

- Explanation: Marrow steadfastly deteriorates. Thus, one must fill what is vacant. When residing somewhere, one's face does not change and this is called to turn back the years and restore life.

The fourth extends their lifespan by many years and is called an immortal.

- Explanation: These beings have an extended lifespan and are said to be joining the ranks of heaven. Thus they are called immortals.

The fifth refine their forms into *qi* and are thus called true beings.

- Explanation: These beings obtain the original *qi* and are thus said to have refined their form into *qi*. Their true nature is transformed and they are then called true beings.

The sixth refines their *qi* and becomes a being called god.

- Explanation: True *qi* leads to the gods. Their *yin* and *yang* are immeasurable and these beings are thus called gods.

The seventh refines their godly nature and becomes one with the Way. These are known as the Ultimate Beings.

- Explanation: True gods are in agreement with the Way and are thus called Ultimate Beings. These beings are also called Golden Immortals.

In examining one's strength, often reflect without ceasing. Those increasing their brilliance will never run out. The Way's strength desires power like a fire that desires to display its light.

To attain the utmost Way successfully, intelligence must be satisfactorily prepared.

- Explanation: If one understands their true nature, they will successfully attain the Way. Knowledge satisfies brilliance and all methods are completely prepared.

If one then studies for a lengthy duration to settle the mind, the body will not be fixed to a single condition. Hurried years and a filthy nature, form begets emptiness. One speaks of wisdom and awareness. These are those that attain the Way. Those that seek the principles of the Way are actually not yet correct.

- Explanation: The path to the gods is in accordance with the Way and this Way is truly successful. If the mind is bewildered and the body perishes, one is not far from the cycle of life and death. The *Scripture of the Western Star* states, "This is thus the failure of the origin of life. How are we able to know its cause?" Thus, those who study the Way and fail to see any indication of their progress for some time know that their merit is not yet sufficient. Days and months pass while one's age progresses and the material body decays. One can then be called wise and aware. To attain the Way is actually not everything. Thus when one grasps time, a brave and fierce vitality enters.

Acclamation:

Wisdom arises in the borders; fire arises within those fated.

Each tool has a true nature; the flow is lost from the Way's origin.

The arising mind desires knowledge; the mind arises and knows more troubles.

The comprehension that nature is empty; this knowledge is the gate to all miracles.

Mr. Yang: We are very grateful that Tian Zun has bestowed upon us this precious scripture. After hearing this true scripture, the mind and spirit will be clear and refreshed if all within is attained. This scripture will serve as another warning to all mortal beings.

Tian Zun: I hope that all those pursuing the Way will be able to study this scripture. In particular, those that practice and study tranquility must often read it silently and will then naturally enter the path to truth and can possess unimaginable efficacy. Yet one should not look down upon others. I have again led Mr. Yang to observe the "Court of Spirit Cultivation" and listen to the teachings of one of the lofty sages.

Mr. Yang: Okay. Thank you for your guidance. The inside of the Court of Spirit Cultivation is truly amazing. It is vast and tall and each person within emits light and their faces are filled with kindness. Excuse me sir, would you mind telling me how you were able to successfully cultivate yourself and attain the rank you have today?

Xuan Ling Golden Immortal: Good deeds! I attained the Way over one hundred years ago. I was born in Sichuan and when I was young both my parents passed away at the same time. Therefore, I traveled everywhere begging for my food yet I did not covet the possessions of others. My stomach was never full but I quenched my thirst for knowledge. One day while resting in a Daoist temple, a sacred and virtuous master took me as his disciple and imparted to me his Daoist techniques. After undergoing more than ten years of disciplined cultivation and enduring trials from demons without retreating I have arrived at the position in which you find me today.

Mr. Yang: Can I entreat you to share more details about your own path to cultivation so that I may share them with people as an example?

Golden Immortal: It has been some time since I was concerned with the affairs of the mortal world and I would not like to say more about this.

Tian Zun: Please tell us more so that we can save mortals!

Golden Immortal: Okay, although I will participate not because of my own compassion but because mortals are so difficult to save. When I recall my path to cultivation it was bumpy and I experienced many hardships. I had only water as nourishment and I slept on a hard wooden bed. Sometimes I performed mysterious practices to enter the realm of the gods and I went a month without waking. I was also once very ill and I could not be healed. My body developed sores and I was driven out by my teacher. Though my breath was feeble, my knowledge of the Way did not waver and afterwards my teacher gave me a spiritual elixir and my soars were completely healed. Because of this single display of divine power in curbing my illness, thousands of people came seeking a cure daily. This large multitude was rounded up by government officials and taken to jail. While I was in jail I sat in repose and all the evil deeds that I had previously committed were taken away during this experience. In order to avoid imprisonment in hell, one must rely on the punishments of the mortal world to remove all sin. Thus, those that harbor no ill-will in their hearts will be tranquil in prison and admit their past mistakes while following the path to cultivation and meritorious deeds. After six months, because there was no evidence, we were all released. One day, while traveling home at dusk I came across an extremely beautiful woman that wished to worship me as her teacher. She entreated me to practice the Daoist techniques of non-ejaculation. She employed lewd and vulgar speech and her body's appearance to confuse and influence me. I rebuked her and I was not moved, even though she tried to convince through one hundred means. I stayed reposed in the Way despite her exhaustive methods. Afterwards, I felt that this

was a test from a demon seductress and I congratulated myself on passing this hurdle without sinking into the sea of passion and desire. Those on the path to cultivation must be cautious of this demon! Commonly when one encounters this situation it is only in one's imagination. Powdered faces, beautiful dresses, and stunning rouge confuse people's senses and destroy people's goodness. Brave people have said, "To cultivate the mind one must first act as if under observation. Sexual form is imagined, so why should one covet this. The four elements are false without limit. Bitterness reaches to the sky and the earth." How is one not to fear this! Commonly, those pursuing cultivation must endure many trials and tribulations, including the large obstacles of bitterness, pain, and sexual desire. Thus while one is alive these trials should be joyfully accepted. I exhort those mortals pursuing cultivation who have experienced hardships, illness, and trials – or have been in similarly difficult situations – that they must not retreat from the path of wisdom. If they are disheartened for even a moment, the demons have won and the Way is lost. In my arduous trek towards cultivation I discovered my original spirit and was able to discard this shell and soar to the realm of the arhats and immortals. Today, I can easily travel without restrictions and join every golden immortal in the ever-revolving light of the Way.

Ji Gong: Because our time is up we must return to the temple. We are grateful for Tian Zun and the Golden Immortal's teachings.

Tian Zun: I will accompany your return.

Mr. Yang: Thank you, Tian Zun and all immortals and sages. I bid you farewell.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, please dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
September 23, 1979

9th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Palace of the Jade Void: Teachings of Yuan Shi Tian Zun

Poem: Empty and vast space is called the true beginning of heaven. The original spirit combines with the rotating ball of essence. Thousands of gods and ten thousand Buddhas come from this limitless realm. Travel against the current and turn your head from worldly relations.

Ji Gong: If mortals would like to leap down into the abyss of the Sea of Bitterness they need only take one step and they will fall. If they would like to jump to heaven, a simple leap will not propel one high enough because of the force of gravity. Therefore, those on the path to cultivation who would like to escape the cycle of reincarnation must first forsake their desires for appearance and form. Because people are attached to all manner of earthly objects, the mind is infatuated and covetous. This filthy *qi* drags one down to earth and into the nine springs of the Sea of Bitterness. Today in our travels we will again pass through the pure realms of heaven. Mr. Yang, quickly discard everything so that we will be able to soar to the limitless realm of sages!

Mr. Yang: What should I discard?

Ji Gong: Discard all earthly baggage and remove your mental obstructions. Do not ponder these matters so that your very being is void and you carry nothing with you. If you accomplish this your body will become light and only then will you be able to soar to heaven.

Mr. Yang: What you have said is true! Yet why can't mortals carry baggage or bring obstructions?

Ji Gong: The eyes see but do not remember; the ears hear but do not record. The upright mind has no temptations. Baggage cannot be brought with you so that earthly affairs will have no means to obstruct. The material heart should be transformed into a spiritual heart. Even the character "heart"⁴⁸⁶ looks like an airplane when written in its radical form or like an arrow that can soar to heaven. The heart is like a fishing hook⁴⁸⁷ lowered into the vast Sea of Bitterness that stops floating and sinks to the sediment on the bottom where it gets stuck. Even if immortals and Buddhas pull with all their might, they will not be able to pull it up!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful that you have molded my common heart into a sacred one. This settled heart can now follow you in flying to the halls of heaven to visit the majestic sages!

⁴⁸⁶ The heart radical looks like this “忄” without the “中.”

⁴⁸⁷ This is the character for heart that looks like a fishing hook “心.”

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! Just as I expected you have understood what I meant. To protect the upright heart one must travel straight to heaven! Hurry and climb aboard the lotus flower platform and we will travel together to view the halls of heaven and dispel all depressive thoughts.

Mr. Yang: Okay! I am already seated, please take off.

Ji Gong: I will carry you, my worthy disciple, on the lotus flower platform to heaven. At these high heights you will feel the weightlessness of your body! When the weighty filth of mortal affairs is abandoned and ignored, one will naturally return to heaven. Today we will visit the Palace of the Jade Void to pay our respects to Yuan Shi Tian Zun... We have arrived. Mr. Yang, quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I can see a very bright light and it is difficult to open my eyes. I cannot handle it!

Ji Gong: All except those who have attained the high rank of sage, such as average mortals and lesser gods, have difficulties when entering this Jade Palace. This is because it is the source of the Great Way, with a limitless essence and brightness, and this intensity is difficult to withstand. Because you are only a mortal, though you do possess some skill in the Way, you have not yet been refined to complete perfection. Thus, if you would like to travel to this sacred and limitless realm I will give you an elixir to remove your remaining obstructions. Quickly drink it down and it will assist in your skill of the Way.

Mr. Yang: I am very grateful, teacher. Immediately after drinking it I feel like my spirit is one hundred times stronger, my body is able to emit a light, and the light that was so bright before has become softer.

Ji Gong: This light has become more suitable, just as your spirit has become more suitable. When the bodies of those who are cultivated emit light, they are able to reside with the immortals and Buddhas.

Mr. Yang: Ahead of us is a large court with the words “Palace of the Jade Void” written above its door. Inside it is extremely bright, the court is very vast, and it floats among the clouds and an auspicious *qi*. I am unsure, is this palace Yuan Shi Tian Zun’s residence?

Ji Gong: The Palace of the Jade Void is also called the Palace of the Pure Jade and is Tian Zun’s residence. We will quickly enter and pay our respects to Tian Zun; we cannot fail to meet him.

Mr. Yang: Respectful greetings, Yuan Shi Tian Zun. I am the “Sacred Pen” Mr. Yang and I have been commanded to author a book. Today I have come to the Palace of the

Jade Void with my teacher to visit you. I am extremely pleased to meet you Tian Zun and because I am now able to view your sacred appearance I feel as though I have had three lives worth of good fortune. Please Tian Zun, bestow upon us your golden words of direction on this confusing journey!

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: I am honored! I have fostered the pulse of the Way at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies and there have been some outstanding accomplishments by which I am encouraged. The Great Way is always changing and with one word its mysteries cannot be exhausted. If I fail to say everything you can watch my hand point out the way before your eyes!

Mr. Yang: I feel very foolish but I don't know what you mean.

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: "Before your eyes is a narrow road, follow it straight to return home." My hand will direct your path, can you see it clearly? Do you "know the way"⁴⁸⁸ or not?

Mr. Yang: I understand (nodding the head and smiling). I "know the Way"!

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: I will direct you to the original path in front of you. The Way is within you and comprehension will naturally be attained. Even if those who are confused are provided with a light to guide them on this road, they will still succumb to their restless minds and capricious natures. This unsteady path will lead them to fall into dark ditches! My heavenly and vast Way is contained in just this "one, small concept" and though a small matter it still confuses many people and they do not know what path to take. This is pitiful, so pitiful!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Tian Zun's instruction and direction!

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: The limitless ball of rotating essence is the origin of the ninety-six original forms and it lies before us. Yet there are many mortals who are confused and do not know how to return here. This can be done through returning to the light and looking clearly at oneself. Yet many people are focused on the beauty, ugliness and outward appearances of others. Thus, they are very far from the great and limitless Way of heaven. Today, I am directing Mr. Yang to propose that you protect your original mind, original nature, and original spirit and focus entirely on refinement. By protecting this principle, the spirit of harmony will sprout and grow into a healthy tree. Remember with care these words I have spoken, "Ask more about yourself, pay less attention to others." If one follows this path to cultivation, I guarantee that one will be able to grow and "become a person, become an immortal, become a Buddha."

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun's miraculous truths will encourage fierce growth.

⁴⁸⁸ This play on words can also be translated "know the Way."

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: It is because of this fierce growth that one's original nature is able to expand.

Mr. Yang: I again entreat Tian Zun to share more miraculous truths.

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: In expounding the great Way and saving all sentient beings I have some particular teachings that I would like to share. Today, I will briefly explain the good fortune and miraculous occurrences of heaven and earth. Ever since the Heavenly King Tian Zun (Dark and Mysterious Being Above, God, Heavenly Father, Elderly Mother, Great Way, True Buddha, or True Lord) was born from the rotating ball of essence, all that is pure has floated up and all that is filthy has sunk below. This created heaven and earth. Yet the heavenly bodies contain everything on earth like a white egg shell or large membrane. Though the people born on earth consider heaven to be above and earth to be below, they do not yet know where they will reside. Everything above and below is encapsulated within heaven. A heavenly nature is like twelve hours on the clock and it is as if people's bodies have twelve layers. The top twelve layers are inexhaustible and limitless. Therefore, it is said that there are thirteen levels in heaven. The earth is below and its weight sinks and eventually meets again with heaven. Thus, these nine levels have been called "the nine levels that have returned to their original state." In the first and highest earthly level the concentration of *qi* congealed and became "rock," which formed the high peaks and ridges of mountains. The second are called "hills" and big mounds are called hillocks. The third is called "dry soil," which can be found in the environs of Northwest China where dry soil and sand blow and trees are few. The fourth is called "low-lying and damp," which can be found in the Southeast which has land that is low, moist, and mucky. The fifth are called "river gorges" and commonly these long rivers descend a level into the earth and embankments funnel the flow of water. The sixth are called "underground rivers" as below the earth there is river sediment that moves, following the water as it flows this way and that. The seventh are called "yellow springs" as the earth and its water was originally yellow and muddy. These springs come from under the earth. The eighth is called the "deep abyss" and its depth cannot be measured, its mysteries are concealed, and if you follow it to its depths you will come out the other side of the earth eventually find yourself back in space. The ninth is called "sparse irrigation," which is like fog, foam, or mist and is difficult to see. These are the nine lower levels and above them are the nine heavenly levels which have been called the pure realm that animates life. *Yin* is exhausted in these higher levels and *yang* is introduced. Because the earth is round like an egg, we know that heaven lies both above and below.

12 Levels of Heaven:

1. Heaven of the Large Void: This heaven is connected to the earth and appears empty.
2. Heaven of Bestowed Change: Wind, rain, thunder, and lightening; clouds, fog, frost, and snow. All weather is created within this heaven.

3. Lunar Heaven: This is also called the Heaven of the Water Springs. The essence of *yin* accumulates in water. Thus its outside is transparent, part brightness and part dark. It is bright when facing towards the sun and fades when facing away. Facing towards or facing away, as it goes away or comes near, this brightness decreases and increases just as sometimes there is a waxing moon sometimes a waning moon.

4. Heaven of the Traveling Way: The sun and moon travel on their tracks through the four seasons and nine directions. Spring relies on the east for its cyan Way, summer relies on the south for its vermillion Way, fall relies on the west for its white Way, and winter relies on the north for its black Way. The cyan, vermillion, white, and black each have two Ways and the south also contains the equator, the red Way, for a total of nine Ways. Only during spring and summer is the reflection from the sun and moon the same. During this time there are more solar and lunar eclipses and when the sun and moon are aligned this is said to be the yellow Way. Thus this is called the Heaven of the Traveling Way.

5. Heaven of *Yang* Light: The main heavenly body is the sun and the essence of *yang* is fire. Thus this heaven is light and bright within. *Yin* cannot defeat *yang* and the daytime moon disappears from sight. Night is seen from afar and dark approaches, but is turned away by the brightness. In the northernmost regions, the sun can be seen at anytime of the day and night. Thus this heaven is also called the Heaven of the Fire Star.

6. Heaven of the Arranged Constellations: The essence of all things is contained in the stars above and the stars above contain the essence of all things. There are twenty-eight constellations and this is called the Heaven of the Arranged Constellations.

7. Heaven of the Dipper's Hub: Stars are arranged into constellations floating in the void of space. This net of stars in heaven continuously revolves and they all must contain *qi*. These stars are like balloons of *qi* blown aloft. This *qi* rises and falls according to gravitational forces and because of these gravitational forces each star has an orbit and they do not collide or fall, relying on the workings of the limitless and original *qi*. In the center lies the stars' hub. Four stars serve as the constellation's ladle and three stars serve as its handle. The end of the handle directs its lights towards the North Star. This North Star is heaven's hub and does not move. All other stars move around it and it is much like the hubcap on a car. Thus this is also called the Heaven that Manages Movement and all those who speak are moved by this heavenly command center. It is said, "Well-balanced astronomical instruments tell the emperor how he should rule. This is the heaven that instructs rulers how to manage their kingdoms."

8. Immobile Heaven: Heaven, the sun, and the moon travel great distances. There is no stopping. Day and night they move in a circle divided into four sections that turn round and round the hub of stars. Up to this period it is as if the North Star has not

moved. This is solidified into a pure whole and is also called the Heaven of Persisting Purity. This is the name of this true and revolving void.

9. Heaven of the Vaulted Cavity: This level of heaven is like the earth's nine districts which each have their own fixed limits and are named for their essence, appearance, form, and scenery. The east is called Cyan Heaven; the southeast is called Dark Green Heaven; the south is called *Yang* Heaven; the southwest is called Vermillion Heaven; the west is called the Autumn Heaven; the northwest is called the Dark Heaven; the north is called the Mysterious Heaven; the northeast is called the Heaven of the Sky; and the center is called Your Heaven or the Yellow Heaven.

10. Heaven of Fantastic Flame: This heaven is divided into three sections. In the center lies a purple⁴⁸⁹ section and above it is the emperor's throne from which he oversees all affairs. Below this is the North Star and this heaven is also called the Heavenly City District. An emperor also sits in the front courtyard and this heaven is encircled by intense flames and emptiness and is thus called the Heaven of Fantastic Flame.

11. Domed Heaven: This is also called the Dou Shuai Heaven. This heaven is light, calm, and all can be seen clearly. This level of heaven resembles a dome and is named for this. This heaven also serves as the place of residence for Dao Zu and all Buddhas.

12. Heaven of the Great Arhats: This is where the Great Being Xuan Xuan, Three Clarities, and the Five Elders reside. This is in the highest realm of heaven and is the twelfth level from whence the Great Being Xuan Xuan can observe the mortal world below. Its brightness is truly amazing and immeasurable. This forest of arhats is extremely vast.

Mr. Yang: I have heard that the Jade Emperor presides over the thirty-six levels of heaven and governs the seventy-two earthly levels below. What do you have to say about this?

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: There are many, many branches of heaven. Mortals have said that there are nine heavens, thirty-two heavens, thirty-three heavens, and thirty-six heavens. Today I have analyzed a few. Heaven was originally without limits and all above, in the middle, and below was considered heaven. When heaven was first created it was arranged according to the appearance of the stars, reaching into the limitless and sacred realms, and each heaven started to take on the essence and nature of its star. Heaven encompasses all in its 360-degree radius. Thus it is said that there are thirty-six levels in heaven. Heaven is above and earth is below, like a tree and its shadow. Some people doubled the number and created the seventy-two earthly districts. It follows to reason that one circle can be divided into nine heavens, twelve heavens, twenty-eight heavens, thirty-two heavens, thirty-three heavens, and thirty-six heavens. This is just like people adding new rooms onto a residence. You can start

⁴⁸⁹ This deep purple is a very auspicious color.

with the central house and build off from it horizontally, dividing rooms or building new stories. If these divided rooms are to be numbered you would have an Eastern Heaven, Western Heaven, Central Heaven, Northern Heaven, and a Southern Heaven for five in all. Heaven was created within the nothingness of the Wu Ji. The Way became one, one became two, two became three, and these three became the basis for all things. Thus heaven is from the nothingness of Wu Ji. The bright and *yang* heaven is fortunate and the dark and *yin* heaven is calamitous. Regardless of how much those on the path to cultivation have studied, they know that all is built upon one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine. The great Way is not far from this truth. Thus I have used the twelve heavens mentioned today as an outline which can be multiplied by three to become the thirty-six levels of heaven. Thus, heavens can be numbered without limit and multiplied to become any amount. Those cultivated who understand that which is contained within the three realms can understand anything. Now I will again review them!

The Thirty-Six Daoist Heavens:

1. Da Luo Heaven
2. Clear and Bright Heaven
3. Heaven of Emperor Yu
4. Great Red Heaven
5. Sharp Merchant Heaven
6. Brahma Degree Heaven
7. Grand Jade Heaven
8. Always Harmonious Heaven
9. Upper Heaven of Enduring Elegance and Joy
10. Completed Heaven of Favor and Miracles
11. Cavernous Heaven of the Primary Abyss
12. Storied Heaven of the Court of White Firmament
13. Pledged Heaven of the Wu Ji's Storm Clouds
14. Joyful Heaven of the Upper Divination Sticks
15. Field Heaven of the Thoughtless River
16. Layered Heaven of Tai Huang Weng
17. Flowing Grass Heaven of Shi Huang Xiao
18. Windy Heaven of Xian Ding Ji
19. Precipice Heaven of Emperor Tai An
20. Ascended Heaven of Yuan Zai Kong
21. Jade Heaven of Tai Huan Ji
22. Celebratory Heaven of Xuan Ming Gong
23. Calm Heaven of the Extremely Bright Monastery
24. Glorious Heaven of the Temple of the Bright Void
25. Eggplant Heaven of Emperor Zhu Luo
26. Floating Heaven of Glorious and Bright Sect
27. Chinese Heaven of Xuan Ming Gong
28. Yang Heaven of Bright Red Peace (Chi Ming He)

29. Shaded Heaven of Tai Ji Meng
30. Nourished Heaven of Xu Wu Ping
31. Barbarian (Yi People) Heaven of Seven Glorious Rubs
32. Chosen Heaven of the Glorious and Bright Culture
33. Nourished Heaven of Xuan Tai Ping
34. Child's Heaven of Qing Ming He
35. Encompassing Heaven of Tai Ming Yu
36. Past Heaven of the Great Emperor Huang

The Twenty-Eight Heavens of the Three Buddhist Worlds:

1. Heavenly District of No Thought and Thought
2. Heavenly District of Omnipresence
3. Heavenly District of Omniscience
4. Heavenly District of Boundless Emptiness
5. Heaven of True Appearance
6. Heaven of Virtuous Existence
7. Heaven of Virtuous Appearance
8. Heaven of No Heat
9. Heaven of No Worries
10. Heaven of No Thoughts
11. Heaven of Numerous Effects
12. Heaven of Arising Blessings
13. Heaven of No Clouds
14. Heaven of Complete Clear
15. Heaven of Immeasurable Purity
16. Heaven of the Young and Pure
17. Heaven of the Bright Sound
18. Heaven of Immeasurable Brightness
19. Heaven of the Young and Bright
20. Heaven of the Utmost Brahman
21. Heaven of the Assisting Brahman
22. Heaven of the Multitude of Brahman
23. Heaven of Transformation into Carefree Beings
24. Heaven of Transformation into Happiness
25. Heaven of the Dome
26. Heaven of Night Control
27. Heaven of Beneficial Shyness
28. Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings

Mr. Yang: What you have said is truly miraculous. Yet I have also heard that those cultivated must transcend through the three realms. What do you have to say about this?

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: There are three realms: the realm without form, the realm of form, and the realm of desiring form. I have provided a diagram for those who wish to transcend the three realms and attain the realm of the great arhats, golden immortals, successfully become a sage, or visit the realm of the Buddhas.

Diagram of the Three Realms (Transcending the Three Realms)			
Above the Head: Void and Emptiness	The Head: Palace of the Mud Pill	The Abdomen: Cinnabar Fields	The Kidney: Purple Palace
Extreme, Limitless Realm World with Absolutely no Form Heaven of True Reason First and Original Heaven True Immortals True Buddhas True Sage	Limitless Realm World without Form Heaven of Reason Original Heaven Immortals Buddhas Sage	Extreme Realm World of Form Heaven of Qi Central Heaven True Person Bodhisattvas Worthy Person	Realm of the Emperor World of Desire Heaven of Appearance Rear Heaven Common Person Common Person Common Person

To achieve cultivation in the great Way is like attaining entrance to the world without form. Those that have reached this limitless realm have ascended to the highest peak. Though this realm's control is not as tight as being led around by one's neck or having a one's head covered, there is still some measure of control. The light above has no boundaries to hinder or obstruct it and is thus called "transcending the three realms." People often mistakenly spread this principle, believing that from the start Buddhas are able to escape these three realms without knowing that immortals and sages of the Wu Ji can also do so. Thus the scriptures say, "Every form is false." No form is similar to the Wu Ji. Yet in order to escape one's body and achieve freedom, a golden body must be obtained to facilitate soaring to the World of Absolutely No Form (this World without Limits is also called the final realm of Nirvana). All mortal beings originate from the ninety-six original spirits and it does not matter to which religious teaching they adhere. These people must first grasp the dual nature of all things and extinguish their desires for slanderous teachings. Neither separations nor complaining can arise or their minds will contain worldly affairs. Thus, even though they have amassed great amounts of merit their minds are not empty and, like the diagram displays, they have only attained the rank of the World of Form and are unable to ascend into the realm of the World without Form. I hope that those listening to my speech will quickly change their actions and abandon their attempts to hold onto material things. Otherwise their path to cultivation will be wasted time and very difficult. Argumentative teachings do not allow one to rest and these people will surely end up in Ah Xiu Lo's Hell.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁹⁰ Ah Xiu Luo (阿修罗), or Asura, is said to have jurisdiction over the lowest realm of hell from which there is no escape.

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun's skill in the Way is great and merit extensive. You have revealed much that has happened and is yet to come by divulging these miraculous secrets. Thank you for these heavenly teachings.

Ji Gong: Tian Zun is the instructor of all beings in heaven. Therefore he is able to reveal these miraculous affairs. He is able to augment people's comprehension and those on the correct path will have their previously false notions changed to correct teachings by dispelling evil teachings and stopping incorrect views. I hope that all mortals who are predestined to be saved will carefully read this book and thus find a harmonious path, attain enlightenment, and return again to reside in this original and heavenly realm.

Yuan Shi Tian Zun: All of the three thousand great worlds originated from the Supreme Being. Those that spread teachings have established their own sects and fight without rest, jealous of the *qi* floating above and stubbornly adhering to the things of this world. Thus they are not yet able to throw off their earthly form and transcend the three worlds and five senses; it is actually quite pitiful! Beneath the canopy of the Jade Palace lies the upper limit of the river from whence the origin of the Supreme Being's power originates, the middle reaches of this river are the origins of the Supreme Being's middle essence, and the lower realms of mortals holds the remaining amounts of the Supreme Being's *qi*. It is thus the upper realms of heaven which house all the immortals and Buddhas whose spirits contain lots of *qi*. Within the middle realm of the stars are all of the gods who will continue on to the higher realm of the immortals and Buddhas when their *qi*, which is already quite distinct, has been transformed. Last, are humankind and all material things. This level is the middle realm, it contains the *qi* of the stars, sun, moon, earth, and seas, and it is the origin of all life. Thus its *qi* is like mixed like water. Although humankind does not possess the Supreme Being's "surplus *qi*" and perfected body, they are still able to possess a heavenly nature and achieve all virtues and actions and elevate their common bodies to heaven. Conversely, if people's bodies have not obtained the Supreme Being's surplus *qi* they will sink and drown in their desires for material things and disappear into nothingness and the light of their being will vanish into a hell of their own creation. I hope that mortals' bodies are enlightened by my words and they protect their bodies, minds, and conscience and strive to save all sentient beings. I enjoin all to transform themselves and meet us here on these heavenly shores.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful Tian Zun for your teachings; I kneel before you in thanks...

Ji Gong: Today Tian Zun has shared some miraculous secrets and all mortals are very fortunate. Our time is short and I must accompany Mr. Yang back to his temple.

Tian Zun: The miraculous Way can never be completely told, the true heart is contained within.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Tian Zun, we bid you farewell.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, please dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
October 16, 1979

10th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Palace of the Jade Void: Teachings of Yuan Shi Tian Zun

Poem: Honor and wealth are impermanent. Dreams of love lengthen the night. The joyful heart does not grow old. Worries and obstructions harm one's spirit.

Ji Gong: Heaven is a vast, limitless, and joyful realm. The divisions in heaven are not made between people of different nations and though religions are different those who are accepted are all good people, virtuous people, and people of the Way.⁴⁹¹ Each person is comprised of good qualities and the first grade of people are lined up and allowed into the highest heaven, the second grade of people are lined up and allowed into the central heaven, the third grade of people are lined up and allowed into the lower heaven, and so on for the fourth, fifth, sixth and lower levels. Just like people, ghosts pass through four rebirths and six levels of reincarnation. Thus this lotus flower platform has nine layers of petals which correspond to differing levels of merit. All people have the nature of the Buddha and everyone is endowed with the roots of knowledge of the heavenly Way. If one cultivates themselves and nourishes this nature their original spirits will not be concealed and upon death they will naturally return to the original “Land of the Buddhas, District of the Daoists” and will also return to the original, true, and accomplished Way. Heaven bestows upon all mortals a spherical “true soul.” If, during one’s lifetime, one is able to protect this soul from harm it will become a truly precious commodity. Whether alive or dead, this circular “spiritual treasure” will remain. Thus, the Pure and Calm Scripture states, “Although one is said to be successful, they have truly attained nothing.” Those on the path to cultivation are actually only recovering what was originally theirs and do not need to distinguish between many different mysterious and miraculous methods but should only choose one and quickly act! Today, I will again lead Mr. Yang to visit the Palace of the Jade Void and we will pay our respects to Yuan Shi Tian Zun. Mr. Yang, quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform and we will both depart!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the tranquil Palace of the Jade Void. Mr. Yang, quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform and enter to pay your respects to Yuan Shi Tian Zun.

Mr. Yang: Okay! ...The Palace of the Jade Void is certainly very different than the mortal realm. The light here is as bright as daylight and very brilliant. Within the palace there are immortal children who have gathered to welcome us.

⁴⁹¹ Good people refers to Confucians, virtuous people to Buddhists, and people of the Way are Daoist.

Ji Gong: This palace is also called the Jade Capital's Mysterious Metropolis and holds thirty-three other heavens. This is the residence of Yuan Shi Tian Zun. Most common people, except for those that have already attained the Way or those whose merit is extensive, would find it very difficult to come to this location. Today you have received an edict to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and it is only through heaven's mercy that I am able to guide you here. You could say that this is the fortune of three lifetimes and the auspicious workings of fate. You have been predestined to visit this Jade Palace and learn the origins of the Way. Thus those who came before are called, "Yuan Shi Tian Zun."⁴⁹² Today we will visit with Tian Zun and entreat him to enlighten us on the origin of the Way. Mr. Yang, please pay your respects to Tian Zun.

Mr. Yang: Yes! The Palace of the Jade Void sits among thick clouds but I can see Tian Zun with his compassionate eyebrows and intelligent eyes sitting upon a five-colored⁴⁹³ lion made of gold. A circle of light constantly revolves around him and I am dizzy and feel as if I will fall down...

Ji Gong: Compose yourself. Tian Zun is using some of the heavenly *qi* of the Way to bolster your spirit, thus you feel a little woozy.

Mr. Yang: I can already feel that my vitality has been roused and my spirit feels satisfied. Respectful greetings, Yuan Shi Tian Zun. Today I have returned to the Palace of the Jade Void with my teacher. Please Tian Zun, share with us more teachings.

Tian Zun: You two are very hard-working, please sit! I will spread my teachings to the earth below. People's hearts are not what they once were. I will restore the original and heavenly spirit bestowed to all people with what it has gradually lost. Scientific achievements have improved the quality of life, yet people's spirits are lost and perish. The Way of virtue is not cultivated, thus most people lose their spiritual essence, remain in the cycle of death and rebirth, and never return to this heavenly region. The heavenly heart is compassionate and I cannot bear to see people's original spirits lost. Thus I commanded the founders of the five major religious traditions to descend to every section of the earth and direct people to the path to heaven. Yet after these religious founders returned to heaven, they each left large canons of literature that their disciples continuously changed and the truth within was confused or lost. Today, although there are some worthy disciples pursuing the Way, they are far from treading on the ground of truth. They do not study the origin of the Way and are focused entirely on superficial knowledge. Therefore, even if they have some knowledge of the Way they are still only scraping the surface and their inner humanity is not touched. Thus, today we will again author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and open new paths of inquiry to divulge this knowledge and correct the confusions that have been spread among mortals. Those people who are studying the Way must diligently

⁴⁹² Original, heavenly ancestors

⁴⁹³ One color for each of the five directions

read this book with an open mind and divulge its meaning. Those pursuing cultivation cannot be lazy as I will ensure that their original spirits will return to this gate that does not distinguish between peoples and allows all become cultivated in the Way!

Mr. Yang: May I ask Tian Zun, which is the true Way?

Tian Zun: People have studied Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, and Islam and there are one thousand gates to one hundred religions. Yet each religion says that it is the only one while *qi* remains higher than them all. The Way was originally not named, though it is called the Way, and thus represents nothingness. Thus those that attain the Way must have a light above their heads; the light from their original spirit. If this light darkens or loses its luster it is said that this person has an “injured spirit” or it is called the “multitude” and this spirit is the seed of reincarnation. If one’s original spirit emits a light this is a seed that will not sprout and the road to reincarnation is severed. This type of spiritual seed is that of the original spirit and will be allowed to return to its place of origin. Thus the *Scripture of Tai Ji’s Rotating Ball of Essence* explains, “All people have an external appearance and those with bodies of substance have an appearance inside. Those with the trace of appearance are still connected to their origins and are not headed for darkness.” Immortals, Buddhas, sages, and worthies have all attained this original state. Thus those that understand the Way do not need to be forcefully separated upon entering the gates of heaven as their external appearance is false and their true hearts are found within. The active pursuit of this original condition is recognized as true cultivation and the true Way.

Mr. Yang: People speak of the great Way, but which is the true Way?

Tian Zun: When people pursue the source and sacred *qi* they will attain the rank of sage. Today, the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond has commanded that we accept all spherical spirits into heaven, even though there are many mortals that have not studied these truths. Those who are accepted are those that have recovered their own spirit and virtuous nature and caused their own spherical spirit to become sufficient. Thus each individual must cultivate their spherical spirit, all families can be cultivated, and all religions must facilitate this cultivation. All must return to their origins and hand in this original spirit to the “spirit warehouse.” The *Dao De Jing* says, “The origin of heaven has no name and has been called the mother of all things... These two produce the same things and are strangely named. They can both be called mysterious and within these mysteries there are other mysteries and the gate to all miraculous.” The Golden Mother is the five founders of the religions rolled into one and is also the mother of the ninety-six original spirits. She has been called “mother” not the “Way” and therefore after all of the spherical spirits have been accepted by the Golden Mother’s body they must pass through the pure and tranquil waters of the Three Clarities, be washed clean, and return to the original ball of essence. It is only then that one has been accepted into the “complete sphere.”

Mr. Yang: Listening to Tian Zun’s golden teachings, I feel like you have created a “Pagoda of Golden Words” that appears as a “ladder to heaven.” Climbing from the bottom one can stand on the top and the journey will at last be complete.

Ji Gong: The Golden Mother cherishes all of her creations which climb up this ladder to heaven and return to their natal home. I have seen her gaze anxiously until her eyes are worn out and yell until she is exhausted. This is because a mother and child are joined by the same heart. How could she not wait to hear of their return? Would you like see where you lived before your parents are born? In addition to this common world, people stop for ten years in a temporary and “common residence” of wood and rock. Would you still like to go here? Wouldn’t you rather stay in heaven above where there is shelter and where water, fire, and wind are kept out, where your possessions will never be stolen in an unspoiled “golden mansion”? Quickly cultivate your impregnable body and enter the halls of heaven where every season is like spring!

Mr. Yang: Teacher, upon hearing these touching words my heart aches!

Tian Zun: You are very wise and only need to finish authoring *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* for your golden residence to be constructed in this heavenly realm. You will also create a step to heaven for many of your peers who will also reside in these “heavenly villas.” I deeply long for people to earlier pursue the path to cultivation and the great Way. Meritorious action leads to virtue and the merit that one accumulates can eventually be used build a pagoda. In a short time, one will be rid of this false body and will be able to fly to the wonderful realm of the arhats. This is the “Gold and Jade Halls of Fulfillment” and within these heavenly villas one can peaceful reside in carefree existence.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Tian Zun, for your revelations. I once heard that when people are cultivated they will return to the presence of the Golden Mother. Is this the same as achieving the Way?

Tian Zun: The “origin” of heaven is without name and is called the “mother” of all things, thus the “original beginning” or “Golden Mother” are said to be the same body with two different faces. The Golden Mother is the original beginning and mortals call her mother, which represents the close and intimate relationship between heaven and mortals. This mother looks at all people as her children and pities and loves them! Therefore, the Golden Mother resides in the upper reaches of heaven and manifests her compassion while saving mankind. The Golden Mother lives in the Heaven of the Five Elders and gazes out of the gate of the Jade Pond, vowing to save all original spirits. Thus, if all sentient beings are able to pursue cultivation to the end they will recognize this Golden Mother’s nature as their own and plan on achieving the Way. Once one knows that they have come from this Mother, that one’s spirit has been bestowed from heaven, that the Dark and Mysterious Supreme Being governs all spirits and because he is a Supreme Being to worship the Golden Mother is to worship Tian Zun and the Supreme Being. Thus one should consider all spirits to be from the

same womb, all gods and sages are from the same origin. One can certainly not distinguish between an arrogant mind which causes the original spirit to separate from the essence of the Way. If I was the only one to worship, I would appear frivolously in a temple as a “god of the rear court” among the gods and sages and thus one’s *yin* mind of the Way would appear. When one thus discriminates against others one will be sent below. You should know that all of these gods are inside my heart (an extension of me) and to despise the gods and sages is to despise oneself. Those that are not yet cultivated often maintain this attitude. If one has acted thus towards my representation in a temple they will have no means to reunite with the Wu Ji and great Way upon death, be reunited with their Mother’s body, or be called the true seeds. All sentient beings exhale the same “*qi*” and this *qi* is extinguished when the body dies. Thus, it is said that all sentient beings are changed with one *qi* and this is the truth. If one is cultivated their spirit will return to the Heaven of the Five Elders and see the Golden Mother and after they have faced their origin their original spirit will continue upwards above the Three Clarities, the San Hua Ju Ding, and float up to the Da Luo Heaven to be reunited with the Wu Ji and the great Way. Yet if while still on earth one is able to understand Wu Ji’s great Way, cease all desires, and become truly cultivated, their merit will be overflowing and in a short time they will cast off their false form and will quickly ascend to the Da Luo Heaven. Therefore I hope that all people will open their minds, struggle to escape this world of form, and will attain for themselves Wu Ji’s great Way. Now I will provide a diagram that explains to people how to care for their original spirits:

Care for the Original Spirit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No cultivation of the spirit (common realm) 2. Empty <i>qi</i> (spirit’s <i>qi</i>) dirt and filth 3. Selfish desires, full of desires for things 4. People’s minds completely <i>yin</i> and dark 5. Looks just like hell
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial cultivation of the spirit 2. Empty <i>qi</i> (spirit’s <i>qi</i>) partially pure 3. Slowly revealing the heavenly light of dawn 4. <i>Yin</i> and dark of people’s minds gradually reduced, <i>yang</i> begins to emerge 5. Hell fades to the periphery (a lesser world)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The next level of the cultivation of the spirit 2. Empty <i>qi</i> (spirit’s <i>qi</i>) half pure, half impure 3. <i>Yin</i> and <i>yang</i> are equally present 4. Sincerely protect the great Way, <i>qi</i>’s substance is not yet transformed 5. A central world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Entering the realm of the cultivation of the spirit 2. Empty <i>qi</i> (spirit’s <i>qi</i>) more pure, less impure 3. Yang grows while yin shrinks (still have a strong

- | |
|---|
| grip on material form)
4. Selfish desires retreat, heavenly wisdom grows
5. Central and higher worlds |
| 1. Utmost realm of the cultivation of the spirit
2. Empty <i>qi</i> (spirit's <i>qi</i>) pure realm
3. Pure heavenly wisdom, pure <i>yang</i> light
4. Mysterious gate appears (originally only material form was seen and now all are the same spirit, no male or female)
5. The higher world (no form or appearance, a vast and open sphere) |

Ji Gong: Tian Zun's words are certainly correct. The true Way has no form and real Buddhas have no appearance. All people pursuing cultivation will surely wish to release their hold on material form and will then start to be able to certify the result of Wu Ji's Way. Look at the nothingness within Wu Ji's diagram, your mind cannot be empty if it cherishes things like corn. This is the method of nothingness, a "return to emptiness." Although your meritorious actions are vast, you are still within the central world. Therefore, the Five Elders, three purities, and one *qi* are within the realm of Wu Ji. If people are truly able to attain the great Way they will return to the Heaven of the Five Elders and the Da Luo Heaven. It is your own choice if you would like to travel!

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun, there is an immortal child next to you that is smiling at me. Who is this?

Tian Zun: You don't recognize him?

Mr. Yang: His face does look familiar.

Tian Zun: He is the child of the Jade Void.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. I pay my respects to the child of the Jade Void!

Tian Zun: This is his original spirit. The child has also divided his spirit and sent it to the mortal world below in order to save sentient beings.

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun, will you please tell me by what method immortal children are able to divide their spirits?

Tian Zun: All those successfully cultivated, immortals, worthies, Buddhas, or sages, are able to transform their bodies and divide their spirits. This is because when the fruits of the Way are full, skill in various methods is like a spring that can overflow to the mortal world. One is then able to divide body into hundred of millions parts; transformations without ends. Like water within a cup, one drop can form into an immortal or a person. Thus immortals and Buddhas can divide their spirits and

descend to earth. When one's merit is full and cultivation complete, this spirit will return to its original position, as if old water returned to the cup, and the fruits of the Way will increase. This is the season for saving sentient beings, and worthies, sages, and Buddhas time and again send their spirits to the mortal world below to save sentient beings. Nowadays there are many young men and women who have righteous natures, endlessly working towards the Way, and saving souls in all locales. These are the transformed bodies of immortals and Buddhas and are not able to conceal their true and heavenly natures.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. I earnestly ask for Tian Zun's compassion for those of us foolishly born on earth. Each person fated for the path of cultivation and each righteous believer passes through seasons of misfortune, illness, or hardship. Although we have doctors and medicine for the spirit, when an old illness departs a new illness arises in its place. This leaves us tangled in incessant heartache and many people today sorrowfully conceal their pain. Tian Zun, you are the ancestor of our original spirits and we are all born from the same *qi*. I implore you to bestow a method that will free us from distress and save all sentient beings. What does Tian Zun think about this?

Tian Zun: This is good, this is good! Sentient beings have more illnesses because of the sins of the world. Demons of illness entangle the body and heartache does not dissipate. This is called the "punishment of living." In order to restore all sentient beings to their origins in the heavenly essence, I will now share my "Charm of the Rotating Ball of Essence for the Ill Spirit" in order to dispel distress. When mortals suffer from an illness or calamity, medicines can fail the spirit and the *qi* of the heavenly spirit will weakly revolve. Therefore, when the demons of illness approach one should ask for earlier recovery at any time after the body and mind are cleansed. Within a quiet room one should burn incense and say, "Superior spirit Yuan Shi Tian Zun be seated. In front of you is your worthy disciple (or female believer) with _____ bodily suffering or _____ illness. Today in the presence of worthies I express my wish, a wish to rid myself of the affairs of the three worlds. I seal and present *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* _____ number of books, cultivate merit, and devoutly read aloud the Charm of the Rotating Ball of Essence for the Ill Spirit while imploring Tian Zun to bequeath his favors and dispel calamity." Once the invocation is complete and the charm has been read aloud nine, forty-nine, and ninety-nine times and its meaning has been followed, the rotating ball of essence will descend and it will heal quickly as its spirit and *qi* cover the entire body. Illness will vanish, in nine deaths people will obtain only one rebirth, and you will feel the response as though it were a sound. Yet those that have not demonstrated their righteous wishes cannot read this aloud or hide anything from the gods and sages. I hope that sentient beings look at this lightly!

Charm of the Rotating Ball of Essence for the Ill Spirit

Rotating ball of essence, the great god's surplus, bestow upon your worthy disciple (or female believer) _____, sickness collected sickness dispelled, five directions upright *qi*, cover my body, many great

accomplishments, like desire attacks action, cautiously convene ten great accomplishments. Minor official of the acupuncture needle, cover me with *qi* and heal this illness, heavenly doctors and great sages, follow my invitation and arrive, summoned and met, many charms many spirits, do not violate this decree, obey this decree, sin is in the clap of thunder, quickly like the decree of law.

(Read aloud again)

First heaven first earth, original origins ancestor's *qi*, reduce death elevate life, lengthen life on earth, seal of the Jade Emperor, ghosts and gods all flee, correct maintenance of the three worlds, gather together all spirits, Yuan Shi presides, all gods pay their respects.

Ji Gong: Tian Zun is very compassionate in bestowing this charm for the recovery of the ill spirit. Sentient beings are very fortunate. I hope that all are able to read this charm with a true spirit and propriety, pure spirits that have been rid of all sins. This lucky star will then save all below and sin will disappear. This would be an unbelievable and favorable occurrence. If the demons of illness do not retreat, only the spirits of the gods are able to expel them. Those who constantly use this medicine and sincerely invoke this charm will naturally attain unimaginable merit.

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun has graciously bestowed upon sentient beings a secret to life in this charm for the spirit; his benevolence knows no bounds. I have an additional question to ask. Because people's original natures originate with Tian Zun's profound body, when the sons and daughters of mortals are not filial to both of their parents what effect does this have on the spirit and *qi* of heaven and earth?

Tian Zun: Goodness! Mr. Yang is truly a caring person. Goodness and filial action comes first,⁴⁹⁴ yet mortals today are often rebellious and unfilial. In discussion of their reasons we can also discuss cause and effect. The rearing of sons and daughters is the start of all human relationships. To support these sons and daughters is the solemn duty of parents. Yet today's parents are indifferent and unkind. Mothers only consider their own beauty and appearance, and do not wish to allow their children to nurse. Instead they use the milk from a cow to raise them and everywhere there are girls and boys nourished by cattle. When boys and girls are young and are not nourished by the milk of their mothers their bodies contain less of the vitality and original elements found within their parents. Moreover, the opportunity to lavish affection on one's children will be diminished. Parents often use a cradle, toys, a playpen, or childcare. These are cheap ways to care for a child and have no substance. When this occurs a child's heavenly *qi* is reduced and once they have grown they will naturally neglect their filial duties. The western world is even more ungenerous in regards to filial actions which is due to the neglect of children. Therefore, I exhort all mortals to properly raise their sons and daughters. One must use a sincere heart, not be selfish, and use several tools of cultivation in raising their children. Otherwise, the next

⁴⁹⁴ This is the saying, “百善孝为先.”

generation will be stuck in a deep ditch and have no emotions to reciprocate. There is no selfishness in the Way, only heavenly wisdom. Human relationships are nourished and everything has its place within the great Way. If everything was done according to scientific methods then people would enter a “transformed” world, the strength of spirits and ghosts would weaken and human nature would cease to exist. Although some sons and daughters want to diligently study, one should hope that their learning will achieve profit without violating the Way of heaven. Therefore, I hope that mortals will offer more of themselves without hoping for economic recompense for their affection. Once these children have grown they will naturally not rebel against the filial path and obediently follow the human relationships.

Mr. Yang: What Tian Zun has said makes sense. Mortals are selfish and care only for their own benefit. Therefore, their recompense is often “harmful emotionally.”

Ji Gong: Because time is short we must bid you farewell but we will return to visit at another time.

Tian Zun: I will accompany you both back to the temple!

Mr. Yang: There is no need! I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Thank you for Tian Zun’s teachings.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, please dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
November 2, 1979

11th Journey: Third Journey to Listen at the Palace of the Jade Void: Teachings of Yuan Shi Tian Zun and an Imperial Audience with Lord Xuan Xuan

Poem: *The common world bewilders people with its beauty. Wise scholars return to associate with the Buddhas. The empty splendor of fantasy worlds is like the moon reflected in water.*⁴⁹⁵ *The mind without desire can obtain refinement and truth.*

Ji Gong: The common world is very magnificent and stimulates the six senses which then ensnare people. To find the road to heaven is not an easy matter! How many heroes and courageous people desire to travel to heaven yet find it too difficult to pass by a beautiful woman and are lost in the end.⁴⁹⁶ It is actually quite pitiful! I hope that mortals will not be bewildered by a season of beautiful flowers. You will see that at the conclusion of this short season, the flowers will wither and their petals will drop to the ground and be scattered in the wind. What will you be able to gather then? In the heavenly realms every season is spring and this location, which is the origination of peach blossoms, allows people to view the vastness of the mind and the pleasure of the spirit. I warn licentious people that true beauty is in heaven and that the beauty of the mortal realm is just a false camouflage. When people die they are no longer “moved by sound or form” and become a cold corpse. Will you still long for licentious pleasures after this? After a few decades, both you and your lover will return to the yellow earth and where will your love be then? This is not at all like the carefree state of existence that I myself am in, with absolutely no obstructions, irregardless of whether or not you love me or worship me! My body is free and I do not depend on anyone. Thus what could anyone do to me? I am completely free! Mr. Yang, get ready to climb aboard the lotus flower platform. Today, we will travel again to the Da Luo Heaven.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated, please teacher take off!

Ji Gong: Time and again I have guided my worthy disciple to glide around the sacred realm of heaven. How are you feeling right now?

Mr. Yang: Right now as I break free from this mortal realm of filth and toil I feel completely unperturbed! I truly wish that I could continue to journey through heaven and never return home.

Ji Gong: That would be a crass pursuit which would demonstrate that filth is still with you. You must exhibit a desire to return and save all sentient beings. Only then will your meritorious actions be full and your return here not delayed.

⁴⁹⁵ The “moon reflected in water” is a common saying that refers to false or dream-like images.

⁴⁹⁶ There is a common saying, “Heroes find it difficult to pass by a beauty’s gate” (英雄難過美人關).

Mr. Yang: When my time comes, will you save me and take me back to heaven?

Ji Gong: Countless mortals have read the accounts of your journeys and they have exhibited very sincere hearts, cultivated truly refined natures, and their actions have achieved true results. Because you have assisted me in guiding so many people to return to heaven, I am afraid that my own technique at dividing my spirit to guide them all here will be insufficient. You already know this road so you should return by yourself!

Mr. Yang: What if I get lost?

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! Do not forget to bring the Way's "southern compass" which will guide you to a quick arrival at the Gate of Southern Heaven. I also hope that you are able to serve as a "travel guide" like me and not come just as a "tourist"! Actually, if one wants to travel the road to heaven, it is just like a "highway" and there are signs at every rest stop such as the "San Gang Stop," "Wu Chang Stop," "Ba De Stop"... The Way extends in all directions and those cultivated will exceed their goals with outstanding results. You only need to know someone who can read characters and knows the path, and observe and follow their directions. It is not even necessary for that person to be a guide as all on this road will find their way to heaven. Today, we are no longer as we once were. The knowledge that people have available today is much more advanced and those who can read are many more. Write down your experiences and record this road for those that wish to return to heaven. You do not need to trouble me to guide you back here.

Mr. Yang: I understand. Thank you for your guidance!

Ji Gong: While discussing this road we have already arrived in front of the Palace of the Jade Void. Mr. Yang, quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform and we will pay our respects to Yuan Shi Tian Zun!

Mr. Yang: Yes sir! ...Your humble servant Mr. Yang bows politely before Yuan Shi Tian Zun.

Tian Zun: You two have again returned to this sacred realm and I am extremely pleased. You are both working very hard to save sentient beings. This toil and its results can be seen the work and the harvest. I hope that Mr. Yang has a resolute and faithful heart and completes this mission. If completed, your entire being will rise to heaven.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Tian Zun's instructions! I will observe and honor your exhortation and I will sincerely strive to complete this account of my journey. Today, we have again traveled to the Palace of the Jade Void. Please Tian Zun, share some more secrets of the Way with us.

Tian Zun: The great Way is truly mysterious, yet earlier generations have already divulged its secrets! Today you have returned here and I would like to reveal to people another method of cultivation. People have said, “The gods reside three feet above the head” and these three feet represent the three realms. People’s heads are where the gods reside and the body is where they rule. Thus it is said, “The head is the Way.” Because the head is the root of heaven, if it ceases to exist, the foundation collapses and the body dies. When people are alive, their heads point towards heaven and their feet towards earth. Yet when one has died and goes to hell, *yin* and *yang* are inverted. Thus when infants are born from their mother’s earth homes,⁴⁹⁷ their heads point towards the earth as they travel from their previous life to this one. After one or two years, babies are able to crawl, stand, and walk, which restores the head to its correct location at the top and nearest heaven. It is said, “The human body is difficult to obtain,” because animals always have four feet on the ground and their backs point to heaven. This is because in a previous life they acted against the will of heaven and thus retribution from their previous life is felt in this life. This retribution will not be pleasant. Thus this life plays out like it does. Today, we will return to our original natures where skill is refined and everything is not inverted. Inversion is not correct as it burdens heaven and again causes one to be stuck within the cycle of reincarnation. Therefore, people should study the wisdom of the fire arrow that pierced heaven, with an upright mind and true character. The spirit originates from the mysterious gate above the head, pierces the mud ball, and travels to the gods, breaking through the great *qi* layer of the heavenly spirit’s canopy. It can then easily return to heaven.

Mr. Yang: Tian Zun’s words are very true, yet how can one pierce the heavenly spirit’s canopy?

Tian Zun: The heavenly spirit’s canopy is the gate to heaven... The Palace of the Mud Ball. This concealed and mysterious gate guides one to Mount Ling. It completely covers each person’s body and when one is an infant or child there is light above the soft spot of the skull. This is like an antenna above a house and can be used to communicate with heaven and its spirits. Once one has grown, this spot gradually becomes harder and heaven seems more remote as one slowly loses their true heavenly nature and their spiritual light dims. After people are born, they possess both *yin* and *yang* and the door to hell is open and waiting for people to travel below. As people grow and become active, their sexual essence rushes to release, bursting like a dike that cannot be suppressed. These actions cause disasters and the gate to heaven is shut while the door to hell opens and the way of ghosts is followed. Thus those that are cultivated must first close the door to hell and ensure that you do not lose your sexual essence so that your *qi* is sufficient. This is like a cauldron of water that boils so strongly that its lid comes off. So too will their spirit naturally rise. If people are thus able to quell their desires and close the door to hell, their *qi* will be sufficient and they will be able to open the gate to heaven. When the gate to heaven is open, their original spirit will pierce through the great layer of *qi* and fly to the upper realms to become an

⁴⁹⁷ This is a euphemism for vagina.

immortal or a Buddha and one will have no need to again experience the bitterness of the cycle of reincarnation.

Mr. Yang: Contemporary people who pursue cultivation do so at home and have a wife or husband. If they attempted to cease their relations and pursue pure cultivation I am afraid that this will be difficult. Do you have a method which will assist them?

Tian Zun: To attain results while pursuing cultivation within the home is not difficult. Today, I will explain a method for cultivating the Way at home. Sin has always been present and thus sentient beings are always reincarnated. In this modern world, it is about to be noon and at noontime the sunlight is as bright as it is in heaven. Therefore, everything on earth in these contemporary times has been developed to the utmost. It has everything that you would expect to find. When stopping and moving one should always focus on one's essence. Humankind is carefree and boundless, like life within a small heaven. Thus it is a fortuitous time for the great Way to descend to earth and for sentient beings to be saved. Those living in these contemporary times have all obtained a "heavenly pardon" and are bestowed with either happiness or intelligence. Those bestowed with happiness have inexhaustible enjoyment. Those who are intelligent can learn of the great Way everywhere. If you want to enjoy material possessions your vitality must be nourished. It is the responsibility of people to choose. Today, people are very intelligent; they can learn one thing and know ten.⁴⁹⁸ Tools are created with each new day which can benefit humankind. Modern people are like those born at noon, they receive the brightest sunlight and heavenly truths are not concealed. These people's essence, *qi*, and spirit flourish and they are already bestowed with a body that is "half immortal," which could be called an "earthly immortal" body. These people are like the water within a kettle which has not been placed on the fire. Because of the rays of the noonday sun, the temperature within still rises and begins to boil. Therefore, those modern people pursuing cultivation at home only need to observe the virtuous Way found within proper human relationships. Do not wantonly release your sexual essence for this is the true water which can irrigate the mind's fields. Once irrigated, the crop will be abundant, the harvest plentiful, and as the crop matures it will burst free from its shell (a false body). This grain is truly benevolent (like people) and will ascend from this mortal world. People are able to do likewise as the original spirit can pierce through heaven's gate. This will be a very easy task for those who are cultivated. Thus for those in this modern era that are not cultivated; what special occasion are you waiting for to pursue cultivation? Today I have met with the author of *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and I have pointedly shared heavenly secrets. If modern people are willing to pursue cultivation, heaven will pardon three sins and you will only need seven units of merit to achieve successful cultivation.

Mr. Yang: I am very grateful that Tian Zun has again mercifully revealed the secrets of the great Way. You said that people today already have half an immortal body. If one does not pursue cultivation can they become half an immortal?

⁴⁹⁸ This is a common saying that references anyone that is very intelligent.

Tian Zun: Why have I said that people today have half an immortal body? This is because the food that humankind eats today is from the mountains and the sea. They have magnificent foods which are better than those eaten by the immortals and Buddhas. People today wear silk and satin, heavenly garments that are elegant and charming. This is something that immortals and Buddhas also do not have. Modern people live in large skyscrapers that are luxuriously decorated and they can ride an elevator up and down. The heavenly mansions of immortals, gods, and worthies are not as magnificent as the lordly palaces of this mortal realm. Transportation in cars, trains, and planes allows people to come and go freely, just like immortals and Buddhas soar on the clouds and ride through the mist. Heaven's boundaries extend as far as the seas and are difficult to reach. The television, telephone, and fax machine, allow people to be just like immortals, Buddhas, and gods, who communicate with each other across vast distances. Yet it is a pity that although humanity possesses this immense wealth, "life and death" can still not be overcome. Thus people are said to be "half immortal." Though people have half an immortal body, if they do not pursue cultivation, the *qi* of this immortal body will gradually diffuse. One will eventually sink into confusion, with many thoughts of lust and desire, and their *qi* will dissipate and they will transform from half an immortal to a complete ghost. The three gems, "essence, *qi*, and vitality" maintain the original immortal element in people. Daoist scriptures constantly emphasize that those following the Way must righteously protect these three gems. If one rashly dispels one's essence they will certainly have a licentious and covetous life. Lust is the beginning of all evil and will lead to licentious desire which opens the gates to wickedness and hastens one down an evil road. How then is one to regain the true path of cultivation? Every religion teaches people to abstain from evil and to protect their vitality and essence. In these contemporary times this references a "return to origins." As one's vitality declines and everyday affairs cannot be handled it is said that those who have a "desire to obtain a long life, must take a sleeping pill." I hope that mortals will not blindly believe this. If one knows that to protect one's original spirit is most important they will become truly cultivated in the great Way. This is like originally having a lamp with just half its oil and then having a lamp full of oil. Full lamps will burn brighter and illuminate a larger area, so brilliant that it will light the three realms. Golden immortals radiate this bright light because they have attained cultivation.

Mr. Yang: Modern people are very fortunate. Please Tian Zun, continue your valuable teachings!

Tian Zun: *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is a great help to those pursuing cultivation. In order to save sentient beings today I will share the *Forty-Nine Section Primary Path to Cultivation Scripture*.

Translation omitted due to redundancy.

Ji Gong: Tian Zun is very merciful to bestow this miraculous forty-nine sectioned scripture. Each sentence is heavenly scripture and each word contains a miraculous meaning. Sentient beings are blessed to be able to hear of the great Way. We are grateful for Tian Zun's mercy.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Yuan Shi Tian Zun for revealing heaven's mysteries. This will significantly benefit sentient beings and my thankfulness knows no bounds.

Tian Zun: The original and great Way has been laid out and I will not share anymore teachings! I can ferry you across the Three Clarities to pay your respects to another god, what do you think about this?

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for Tian Zun's guidance but I am not sure in which district this god resides.

Tian Zun: This god is the rotating ball of essence's Dark and Mysterious Superior Being, who is at the top of Heavenly Mind Mountain in the Da Luo Heaven. This is the top of Mount Ling, the summit of the Kun Lun Mountains, and is the master of heavenly secrets. Therefore, they are reverently called "Heavenly Father, King of Heaven, God, Elder Ancestor, Elder Mother, Tathagata, and Ruler of Heaven" and all are the origination of the great Way.

Mr. Yang: I once heard that the highest realms of the Da Luo Heaven have no women, yet today Tian Zun has called this deity "Elder Mother." Is this appropriate?

Tian Zun: In the uppermost realms there is still a distinction between *yin* and *yang*, male and female. Those who successfully attain cultivation and ascend to this high rank have already seen past the nature of *yin* and *yang*. Therefore, God is merely an empty, spherical spirit, not male or female. Today when I said "Elder Mother" it represents that this being gave birth to all things in heaven and earth. God could also be described as mercy, love, or virtue, just like all mothers love their children. I hope that all people understand this.

Mr. Yang: Since there is no difference between male and female in this utmost realm, why is the distinction made between male immortals and female immortals?

Tian Zun: This is an external or false representation. You can see that those who have taken the Buddhist vows, left home, and shaved their heads, can no longer be distinguished as male or female after they put on their monastic robes. This is because they have changed their outward appearance but not their original nature. Male and female immortals have cultivated their original natures so that they can return to brightness. Males cease all emissions and females no longer have a monthly period. These immortals appear as children and spread heavenly truth. Among them is Cun Bu Er, a female immortal who pursued cultivation in the Way and splashed boiling oil on her face to ruin her beautiful appearance. One should cast off their crass form and

pursue their original appearance while following the Way. Therefore, although there are beings called immortal males and immortal females, they have already revealed their true heavenly natures. Similarly, the original path has no name though it is called the Way. In name, there are males and females but in reality there are no males or females. When one looks at the human body, children have male and female forms but do not have the desires of males and females. The elderly have male and female forms, but do not have the thoughts of males and females. These people serve as representations of one's original nature. If one can learn to ignore the differences between the sexes, people who cultivate their minds to this level can attain the utmost levels of the great Way and never return to the cycle of rebirth. Thus it is said, "In lower heavens there is male and female (sexual difference) and in higher heavens all are of one *qi* (similar nature)."

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, prepare yourself and harness your *qi*.

Mr. Yang: Yes sir!

Tian Zun: You two follow me as we soar above...

Mr. Yang: In one stroke Tian Zun has caused both Ji Gong and I to float aloft. This is like harnessing the clouds and riding the mist. Tian Zun's powers are limitless. I see a light approaching and it is difficult to open my eyes.

Tian Zun: This location is above the Three Clarities and is an area of residence in Da Luo Heaven. This is also above the thousands of worlds which include all things. This locale is where the spirit of the revolving essence which created heaven and earth arose. Thus, the light and *qi* of the Way here is unmatched. Mr. Yang, your skills are not yet sufficient and it is difficult for you to open both eyes. Quickly bow down! The Dark and Mysterious Being is the great Way and is also called the Sovereign of the Way, the Formless and Ancient Buddha, the Great and Ancient Elder, the Worthy Ancestor of the Rotating Essence, and the Elder Ancestor of the Highest Heaven.

Mr. Yang: All I see is a bright light and I don't see anything else.

Tian Zun: So it is! The great Way originally had no form and this void was called the great Way. All teachings and religions under heaven come from the same *qi*. It is sad that people are not able to realize this truth and fail to pursue any teachings at all. Thus the saying, "The great Way arises from the same origin, all teachings can be traced to here" follows this principle.

The Great and Mysterious Superior Being: Yuan Shi, Ji Gong, and Mr. Yang have all arrived together, a "god, Buddha, and person" with different external forms but each sharing the same nature. Today you are moved to save sentient beings who will return to the mysterious and great Way. This is wonderful! All sentient beings and every living creature arose from the division of my being, thus it is said:

Poem:

Before the primordial chaos the Way already existed,
The earth and stars are created from *qi*;
In one sixty-year life cycle it is impossible to know everything,
I am formless and hidden so people do not know my name.
I have been collecting *qi* for a long time,
I was even present in the beginning's primordial chaos;
True spirit is present and cannot be extinguished,
I have been born as a Buddha, worthy, god, and immortal.

If sentient beings are able to understand these merciful teachings they will recognize and return to truth and become filial and pure children. If one is able to return to the light and see me, the Great and Mysterious Superior Being, they will become a superior person, a golden immortal, or an ancient Buddha.

Tian Zun: The lord's teachings are complete, Mr. Yang pay your respects.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Tian Zun! Why could I only hear and not see?

Tian Zun: The great Way cannot be heard or smelled. The sound that you just heard is called the "sound of heaven" and to hear it means you are enlightened!

Mr. Yang: No form, no appearance; there are mysteries in emptiness. Each sentence shook my heart, it was wonderful!

Ji Gong: Today, due to Yuan Shi Tian Zun's direction we have been able to see the Original and Superior Being. This is equal to three lifetimes of fortune. If mortal people could observe this realm they would pay respects to our merciful guide! The mysteries of the great Way are all contained within and we have seen the original and true appearance of parents that are not yet born. To face and see one's own ancestors lights and completes the Way. I must return Mr. Yang to his temple, thank you Tian Zun.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Tian Zun for enlightening us. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform, please return to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, please dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
November 28, 1979

12th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Dong Hua Palace: Teachings of Holy Lord Dong Hua

Poem: *One should not go to extremes but choose the middle path. All people obtain pleasure from travel. The highway to heaven welcomes benevolent people. Hell's gloomy ghosts plan how to come through.*

Ji Gong: One should not go to extremes but should choose a moderate way. If one does this they will be welcomed in all locations, will be without enemies, and have no obstructions on the broad highway to heaven. When these people travel on this road and want to pass through crowded locations, people will make way and invite them through. Yet on the other hand, the world has many villainous and evil people. People from every location agree that to waylay travelers is harmful and to loyally protect each other is good. Hunters set up snares in the every part of the mountains to trap birds and beasts. Yet the traps established by villains are even more plentiful and if you are not always paying attention you will fall into one of their traps and perish. There is a common saying, “One catches a snake and is bit by the snake; one catches a tiger and is eaten by the tiger.” I say, “To injure others is to injure yourself.” This is a perfect form of justice and a truth that will never change. The *Tai Shang Gan Ying Pian*⁴⁹⁹ says, “There is no gate to calamity or fortune and only people can summon them; the recompense of good and evil follows one like their shadow” and follows this idea. I exhort all sentient beings to help each other more often and only then will they obtain assistance from other people. This is certain justice and should not be regarded frivolously! Our time to journey to heaven has arrived, Mr. Yang quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated, please teacher take off! Where are we traveling today?

Ji Gong: Today we will journey to the heaven of the Five Elders. The Five Elders reside outside of the thirty-three heavens near the eastern Holy Lord Dong Hua (Elder Wood), the western Holy Lord Xi Hua (Mother Metal), the southern Holy Lord Nan Hua (Elder Fire), northern Holy Lord Bei Hua (Elder Water), and the central Holy Lord Zhong Hua (Elder Earth). These gods originated from the essence of the original spirit and are the origination of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth). Their true *qi* was then used to form humankind and their lesser *qi* was used later to create plants and animals. Everything in the universe was made from the *qi* of the five elements, thus they are called the Five Elders. Today we will first travel to the Dong Hua Palace! The work of authoring *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* has already entered its second stage. Mr. Yang, you are extremely hard-working, your body has undergone this heavy burden, and your spirit has not been able to rest for a

⁴⁹⁹ This book is from the Daoist canon.

moment. Your teacher knows this and as long as you maintain a sincere heart, although it seems difficult to ascend to heaven, it is actually not too difficult. Other demons will come to test your devotion to the Way but if you are unalarmed by the strange sights that they introduce this strangeness will depart. If you are not frightened when you see a demon, these demons will disappear. In order to save sentient beings, difficulties must be endured and it is only through refinement that one can shine. Heavenly help will arrive so keep it up! We have already arrived at Dong Hua Palace. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: The scenery here is beautiful and forests stretch in every direction. There are strange flowers and rare plants, large koi swim freely in lotus ponds, and the environment is pure. This is truly an otherworldly paradise. There is a large court ahead and “Dong Hua Palace” is written above the door. The palace is very magnificent and it engenders the utmost respect!

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, prepare to meet the Holy Lord Dong Hua!

Mr. Yang: This type of immortal realm causes people’s hearts to become as calm as still water and causes one to forget about the difficulties and disruptions of the mortal world. The immortal children are over there watching a play. There are no worries in heaven and they appear so happy! ...As we enter the palace there is an elderly immortal sitting on a throne inside, a cyan light flashes, and I feel my mind relax and my spirit become invigorated. Your humble disciple Mr. Yang has been commanded to author a book and has come today with his teacher to the Dong Hua Palace. Please Holy Lord Dong Hua, bestow upon us your instructions!

Holy Lord Dong Hua: Mr. Yang, please arise. Your precious temple proliferates Chinese culture and exhorts the world. It has amassed boundless merit! The people of this beautiful island of Taiwan are very wealthy, enjoy many freedoms, and there is much religious development. One is able to see righteous temples that represent heaven everywhere. The fact that you have been given an edict to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and save sentient beings is a great honor. The Chinese culture is actually the spirit of all Eastern cultures. I am the official in charge of this Eastern spirit and this is quite a weighty responsibility.

Mr. Yang: The spirit of the East originates from you, Elder Wood, Lord of the East. Please, tell us more!

Holy Lord: The Five Elders represent five virtues, the east (benevolence), the west (loyalty), the center (confidence), the south (propriety), and the north (intelligence), which have been passed on to humankind, (benevolence, loyalty, propriety, intelligence, and confidence). The east arose from wood and this wood has already split into innumerable types from its origin in the rotating ball of essence. There is already “old wood,” thus I am called “Elder Wood.” When the sun rises in the east it is called the “utmost *yang*” and when this *yang* light emerges the world is bathed in

light. This light creates life and sunset represents death. People are born on earth and I am the Lord that governs the liver. A bad liver is like rotting wood and will cause one to lose their life. Sentient beings travel from east to west as they age and in the end, west finally becomes the east. In the east is life and in the west is death. Thus when someone passes away they are said to be “returning to the Western Heaven.” This is because the sun sets in the west.

Mr. Yang: Elder Wood, how did you originate?

Lord Dong Hua: I split from the Three Clarities and created wood. Every tree in every forest originated from my body. This includes bamboo which is used for chopsticks, furniture, beds, firewood, the divination stick that you are currently using, and the wooden images of the gods. All wood originated from my eastern *qi* and thus people of the East use wood for all types of applications. Because the Metal Mother has directed us to save all original spirits, this time belongs to the West, as all have entered the “metal age.” Now metal is smelted to create gold watches, iron beds, iron furniture, steel pens, iron padlocks, steel bars, iron buildings, iron boats, trains, automobiles, airplanes, etc. These material goods are all built with the five metals. Gold and silver are also used as currency. Thus humanity has departed from its natural ways and has entered into an age of Western industrialization. Trees are gradually vanishing from the landscape and within cities it is harder and harder to see them anywhere. Many people only collect and care for small bonsai trees and the landscape appears barren. Every holiday, people gather in large groups and head into the countryside to search for and collect wood and to enjoy nature. The *qi* of wood is the “morning *qi*” or “cyan *qi*” and provides the richest type of *qi* that you can inhale, “cyan, spring *qi*.” Yet because common people indulge in drink, women, and riches, it has caused the root of trees to wither and decay. The *qi* of wood is being lost and the number of people who contract liver disease is increasing.

Mr. Yang: Elder Wood’s virtue is truly without limit, how should sentient beings practice this “wood virtue” in the attainment of cultivation?

Lord Dong Hua: In order to save all sentient beings I will now share a method of cultivation. People were born from the *qi* of the five elements but while rushing about in the common world their vitality is squandered. This causes the five elements to be unable to return to their source and the originally bestowed “complete body of the five elements,” a pure and immortal body, becomes a body that is spoiled. Thus, the spirit and *qi* fail and one is eventually unable to return to their original state. Today, I will blanket sentient beings with the benevolence of the Five Elders in order to save them.

1. The eastern first and second heavenly stems belong to “wood.” Of the five heavenly constants it is “origin,” of the five colors it is “cyan,” of the earth’s four seasons it is “spring,” and I was incarnated in the mortal realm as “Fu Xi.”⁵⁰⁰ Of the five human

⁵⁰⁰ Fu Xi is a mythological character said to have lived in 2800BCE and is considered the originator of the *I Ching*.

relationships it is “benevolence,” within the body it resides in the “liver” and “muscle,” and of the five prohibitions it is “murder.”

2. From the categories above we learn that “wood *qi*” has many representations:

a. Wood...Ancient wood homes and bamboo rooms have been replaced today with tall buildings of reinforced concrete. Metal and stone tools are stiff and have no feeling. This is not like wood, which has rich vitality. Bamboo structures have been changed into iron structures which serve to better protect from outside forces but these large residences and tall buildings encroach upon the sunlight and thus the wood *qi* has diminished.

b. Origin...The origins, the original, the source, and the circular. Heaven’s Five Elders have said, “Origin, enjoyment, benefit, chastity, root,” these are the origins. This is also day-break, beginnings, and origins. Modern people are very vain, do not share, and are focused only on opportunistic affairs. Many write checks without the money to cover them or if they do have money they spend it excessively. This will cause people to lose their original natures. Some people do not protect their original appearance and reshape their beauty, injecting chemical cures which transform their original form. Like the air and water which have been polluted, their appearance will not return to its original and pure state. Thus the original *qi* is lost.

c. Spring (cyan, muscle)...Spring starts the four seasons. The five colors are found in cyan and people’s bodies are made of muscle. The cyan spring relaxes the muscles and joints and all things display vigorous growth. The Way of heaven moves in a sequence. Thus, the four seasons are not all spring but are divided into spring, summer, fall, and winter as the new becomes old and is replaced. Modern people are moved by their spring emotions which blossom early but are not yet strong and are easily broken, not yet ripe but eaten, grow easily but wither quickly. Thus the “cyan spring” departs early and fades before one is old, leaving the whole body’s muscles and joints sore. Like the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, the spring breeze arrives but quickly becomes cold because people have violated the Way of heaven. This causes muscles and joints to become weak and old as the blood vessels are blocked and the motion of the limbs is hindered. This occurs because the “spring breeze” has lost its *qi*, and the “central wind” begins to blow against the body.

d. Humanity (murder)...The five constants: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and belief. The five violations: murder, theft, licentiousness, absurdity, and intoxication. The east is benevolent and forbids murder. Those not benevolent enjoy murder and as heaven’s origin is born, jealously kills life. People and animals all pitifully attempt to cling to life and even things as small as ants, if dropped in the water, struggle to come ashore. How could it be that people could exist without heaven! Arguments often lead to murder or those who are kind are framed. These violations cause one to lose virtue and when the *qi* of murder flourishes, the *qi* of benevolence decreases. Whenever wood is killed it dries up. Similarly, the benevolent live long lives while the violent die young. Medical studies have proven that anger

harms the liver. Therefore, in people that wish to kill the essence of wood is lost and longevity will not occur. This is much like the sentence of execution which will soon be handed down for a convicted murderer or like a branch that hinders pedestrians and will soon be cut down and cleared away by people. Actions that are not benevolent return results that are exponentially less benevolent in kind.

The instructions above are for cultivating the wood virtue and these principles promote life and restraint. If sentient beings are able to take these teachings to heart they will live good and long lives but if they commit violent actions they will be lost. Sentient beings should realize that the truth to cultivation is within these teachings, adhere to the Way for success, lose the Way for failure!

Mr. Yang: We are grateful to Elder Wood for sharing these truths and enlightening sentient beings.

Lord Dong Hua: I will guide Mr. Yang to view the Dong Hua Superior Realm where he will see and record good fortune and mysteries!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful to Lord Dong Hua for bestowing upon me this fortunate opportunity.

Lord Dong Hua: You two follow me! Look at these vast and boundless gardens and orchards, forests of trees, bamboo groves, flowers, medicinal herbs, and vegetables, everything you could expect to find...

Mr. Yang: This is like a large farm where you have planted every kind of seed: fruits, flowers, vegetables, rice, wheat, etc. Everywhere is green and moist and it looks like a cyan and green world.

Ji Gong: Often, cyan and green things are rich in life-giving power. This vitality comes from the east and people are given rice, wheat, and vegetables which are medicinal in nature and save people's spirits. This gift from the east is really too generous!

Lord Dong Hua: Rice, wheat, and vegetables are basic foods for human survival. Injected with my own *qi* they are nourished and grow and supply people's vital organs with the "raw material" that they need. When the growth of these plants is complete and they are harvested I am sacrificing a small part of my own life for humankind to eat. This provides humankind (and animals) with sacred life and is the great Elder's altruistic spirit. Heaven bestows upon common people the raw materials for "life" but mortal people repay heaven with their ever-increasing "evil," this is not proper! Therefore, it is said that from one seed husk of rice "originates life" and from it springs a whole paddy of rice plants. I also am also the "origination and extinguishment" and I can support innumerable lives. It has been said that when one grain of rice is planted it sheds its hardened shell and assumes life in a new body.

Similarly, when people pass away their name dies but they are actually still alive though they no longer exist in their original form. When people grow old and die they continue to exist and assume a new form as a young child. As for the spirit that they have left behind on the earth, after this spirit has separated from their physical body it returns to a carefree heavenly world, like that which Mr. Yang has seen today, which is green and alive, vivid and beautiful. Yet if one wants to recover this type of happy and prosperous existence they must protect these types of proper sentiments and thoughts while on earth. In order to ensure that mortals can attain this type of original existence I have shared how they can achieve this type of skill or technique below:

1. The eastern Dong Hua is the beginning of life just as the sun rises in the east. Do you arise with the sun every morning? If it rises and you continue to lie down you will be unable to attain this early morning *qi*, the *qi* of life. You always be left gasping for breath with the *qi* of death and will become further and further from the eastern Dong Hua.
2. Its glory shines “universally” upon all people. Do you have as broad a mind and heart so that everywhere you go you seek to “look after” others?
3. When others are promoted, gain wealth, or progress do you harbor hate and resentment within your heart and wish to pull them back down? Red eyes contain this murderous *qi* and holding on to it extinguishes one’s heart. This will cause one to lose their true nature, hinder the techniques to a long life, and cause one to grow further from the Dong Hua fortune, life, and *qi*.
4. Do you harbor darkness within your heart, a place so dark that know one knows it exists? If one often retreats to this place and commits deviant acts, one day you will meet with a disaster from which no one can rescue you! This is like transplanting flowers or trees into a room of complete darkness. There is no light for them to grow because they have been cut off from the Dong Hua’s spirit and *qi*.
5. Are you often angry? This anger harms the liver and *qi* like a violent rainstorm and strong winds ravage trees and plants. It will tear off every leaf and cause people’s *qi* to become unstable, mental illness, and a short life. This will also destroy the benefits of the sun and reject the prosperity of the Dong Hua’s spirit and *qi*.
6. If one often enters forests or nature and breathes in the fresh air, eats fresh vegetables and food, gets out into the sun everyday, goes about one’s business in a relaxed manner, and participates in pure matters, you will increase the health of your body and mind, the Dong Hua spirit and *qi* will fill your entire being, and you will retain your youthful essence.

If people are able to follow the six principles outlined above they will find it unnecessary to cultivate themselves in a great Way or attempt to commit acts of great virtue. These people will naturally follow the Dong Hua Way and after death their

spirit will come to join me. Floating lightly it will return to the Wu Ji heaven and attain the Way. Yet mortals have no shortcut to cultivation and they must maintain their mind's purity and brightness, like the natural mind of a child or infant. If one fills themselves with the Dong Hua spirit and *qi* they will then become a Lord Dong Hua or Elder Wood. Look at the east when the sun rises; all creatures "awake" and restore their "original *qi*" like fertile trees that grow happily towards the light. Thus the east protects and nurtures the origins of all living things. When common people earn money they rise early and earn early, rise late and earn late. Thus it is said, "A day's worth is realized in the morning." A wood that grows does so in spring. Thus it is said, "A year's worth is realized in spring." Those pursuing cultivation should study Dong Hua's vitality and if they are early to cultivate they will be blessed with early success. Green wood grows towards the sky; dead wood falls to the ground. Living wood becomes the dead wood for a coffin and those people who follow propriety become people again while those who fall to the depths become ghosts. Sentient beings often die unexpectedly therefore while we are still able to stand, walk, or move we should perform meritorious acts. Like a tree that spreads its branches broad and creates a whole forest, people can nurture their spirits and create fortune for their prosperity. In order to remedy stiff bones and weak muscles dead wood must be replaced with fresh wood and I am afraid this is very difficult. I will share ten verses of poetry with mortals which I hope they will understand!

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

If one is able to understand and recite this Dong Hua charm often their minds and spirits will become purified, calm, and happy.

Mr. Yang: Elder Wood, what relationship do you have with the Three Clarities?

Lord Dong Hua: The Lords of the Three Clarities and the Five Elders share the same origins. The Three Clarities were transformed into the Three Kings and the Five Elders were transformed into the Five Emperors. Tai Shang Lao Jun is my original spirit and I descended to the earth as Laozi to introduce the teachings of Eastern philosophy. Thus I am called the "Founder of the East." Yet mortals only know that Lao Jun was divided into Laozi and are unaware that the Five Elders became the founders of the five religious traditions. China is referred to as the east or the middle. I transformed into one of the five emperors, "Fu Xi," in order to begin the transmission of the Way, thus I am called the "Cyan Lord." The Yellow Elder transformed into the "Yellow Emperor" and thus it is said that Chinese culture must take the "teachings of the Yellow Elder" as their origins. This then is the close relationship between the center and the east.

Ji Gong: As our time is short we must bid farewell to Elder Wood. We will return again to hear Elder Wood's instruction.

Mr. Yang: I must now return with my teacher. I am grateful for Lord Dong Hua's instruction and if I have been impolite in any way I beg for your forgiveness. We bid you farewell.

Lord Dong Hua: I will accompany you both back to your temple.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform and prepare to return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform; let us return to the temple!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, please dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
December 12, 1979

13th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Dong Hua Palace... Teachings of Holy Lord Dong Hua

*Poem: One hundred years pass for old and young. The beautiful scenery satisfies without boundaries. The glowing sunset causes people to act as if intoxicated. This imparts the feeling as if one studied the Eight Immortals in a fleeting dream.*⁵⁰¹

Ji Gong: If one studies the Way while young, their wisdom can be pure and bright and their mind can be reached. This is because the young have not yet been soiled by the filth of this world, as the dirt does not stain, and thus returning to one's pure nature will yield excellent results. If the methods of cultivation are understood while young, the great Way will rapidly be achieved. If the Way is studied in one's middle years, family affairs, failing health, and life's unforeseen problems add to the difficulty of this endeavor. Emotions and desires are lock one in place,⁵⁰² fame and fortune binds, and one can struggle to escape without result. One must cultivate their body and practice skills regularly. Only then will they avoid this type of confusion and distress. Once one has overcome their ensnaring desires for fame and fortune they will then become a liberated god, carefree immortal, and blithe Buddha. When the elderly study the Way, they are traveling at the end of the road. On the one hand they have often indulged in corporeal pleasures, prostitution, and gambling. The elderly's vitality is feeble and while the mind is still active, the body is weak. Heaven just wants them to rest and recuperate. During this time one should look at the affairs of this world – what one has gained and lost, spouses that have gone, children that have grown, married, and moved away – and ponder their escape from this cycle of life and death. All that remains for some is a lonesome heart and cherished memories. One should plan for the future and think about the “exit” after you are 100 years old. Sometimes the heart is nervous so be resolute and determined, unceasingly cultivate oneself, repair any damaged holes, and protect your illustrious body. If you can advance without negligence, you will naturally become an “elderly immortal.” Some take unfair advantage of their own seniority and never change. Yet if one is sick for a long time it is called a chronic illness. If one is old but not cultivated they are like a candle in the wind that is extinguished often. The path ahead then appears dark and gloomy and the road to hell presents itself. At that time it really is “too late.” It does not matter is one is male or female, old or young; all are children of Buddha (god). Do not waste your own life, you only need to obey and do not hinder others while they advance on the “path.” This is the wide road to heaven. Today, I will lead you again to the Dong Hua Palace. Mr. Yang, please quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform and prepare to embark.

⁵⁰¹ This is from the story of a man who has wonderful dreams only to find that he has fallen asleep while cooking his millet.

⁵⁰² This is the saying “情锁爱枷.”

Mr. Yang: Okay! I am already sitting on the lotus flower platform, please teacher take off.

Ji Gong: While guiding Mr. Yang my heart has many feelings. Earthly beings rush about unceasingly but why are they so hard-working, why are they so busy? So many occupations require that people compensate tirelessly so it is no wonder that you are all so busy! Once your debts are repaid you will no longer be so busy, yet many people do not know this life of fortune and instead enter into a “life of gambling” where they continue to create and accumulate new debts. It is no wonder that mortals are forced to work to old age without rest. These people will continue to be busy after death when they are forced to repay their earthly debts which are still due. How can mortals avoid accruing this type of debt? I will impart with you this teaching, “Those satisfied and successful can forget worries; those busy will easily attain cultivation.” This secret is one that people would do well to put into practice. They could certainly be a happy old monk just like me... We have already arrived at the Dong Hua Palace. Mr. Yang, quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform and pay your respects to Lord Dong Hua.

Mr. Yang: While traveling, Ji Gong sings forth his teachings which stir the depths of my heart. All of a sudden we have arrived in front of the Dong Hua Palace. Dong Hua Palace is the heavenly realms most beautiful and its surroundings are overflowing with color and life. I enter the palace and pay my respects to Lord Dong Hua.

Lord Dong Hua: Ah! The world’s material development has already grown to extremes. Humankind is currently studying how to prolong their lifespan. In China there is a saying: “To live as long as Nan Mountain.” Yet how long will Nan Mountain exist? Doesn’t the mud and rock on Nan Mountain slowly move and won’t Nan Mountain’s trees be rotten in 1,000 years? What use would people’s life on this earth be if they were as solid and stubborn as mud and rock? Therefore, people should live like the green trees and only then will they enjoy the vitality of life and have a healthy body that stands out among others. Therefore, today I am again emphasizing the uses of the essence of “wood.” Wood originated long ago so that all people could attain enlightenment in the great Way. I cannot help but use simple words to explain this essence of Dong Hua. It is just like a vegetable; such a small life can support all of humankind. A short stalk is able to rescue people’s lives and extends life without rest. Similarly, you can see that a single word is also able to emit a thunderous sound. Thus people should not look upon this lightly! Today, Mr. Yang has fortuitously come again to the Dong Hua Palace and I will now lead him outside to visit the Dong Hua grounds. Here you will understand the origin of mankind and how to complete the edict bestowed upon you by heaven to ensure that people will be able to return to their original states.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Dong Hua for your kind and merciful teachings. I will attentively listen to your words!

Lord Dong Hua: That is excellent! Please come with me.

Mr. Yang: Following Lord Dong Hua I feel a new and fresh vitality. The melancholy within my heart immediately dissipates, it is too wonderful!

Ji Gong: Green is a wonderful remedy for dispelling melancholy and it can combat aging and gloominess. This is a truth for those people that happily accept green!

Mr. Yang: Ahead there are gardens brimming with trees and flowers. Every tree and flower differs from the next and there is a myriad of different colors. Above these flowers and trees hangs a sign which has people's names on it. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: Ha, ha! Today I will unlock the mysteries of the world for mortal beings. These flowers and trees are the “flowers and trees of original spirits” for people on earth. When the Five Elders created all original spirits I, Elder Wood, also had another responsibility. When humanity was born these flowers and trees where also sprouted. Trees and wood are *yang* – strong, robust, and powerful – which represents masculinity. Flowers tend to be more *yin* – soft, supple, and appreciative – which represents femininity. These flowers and trees symbolize the form of each man and woman on earth. As soon as a male child is born on earth a “tree of original spirit” sprouts forth here from the earth. If a female child is born, then a “flower of original spirit” buds. In the human realm this is called “descending to dirt” and in heaven this is called “coming out of the earth.” Original spirits are endowed with a seed and in the human realm this is called “semen/ ovaries.” This seed is brought forth through pregnancy. When a seed is in the earth it begins to sprout and similarly a person is born. Yet if the seed is rotten or damaged then the embryo is deformed, aborted, or miscarried. These flowers and trees of original spirits in heaven represent the state of merit and physical health for each male and female on earth.

Mr. Yang: Previously, when I was touring hell I also saw “flowers and trees of original spirits.” Why am I seeing the same thing here?

Lord Dong Hua: Heaven, hell, and the human realm co-exist. People's original spirits thus exist simultaneously in three different places: heaven, hell, and the human realm. While heaven is the source of all original spirits, hell and the human realm are also places where these spirits can stay. People descend to be born here on earth as if they are seeds sprinkled from heaven. While initially filled with their original essence, after being scattered below and encountering the filth of this world people are eaten by their passions, their vitality is wasted, and they bear the heavy burdens of work and debt. Thus, mortals are trapped in the gloomy depths of hell and they are left without the strength of spirit to return to the lofty realm of heaven. Both heaven and hell have flowers and trees of original spirits which reflect and reveal the condition of people's merit and health. Heaven is like a large mirror where the actions of the human realm are reflected. These actions are also reflected in hell as these three realms – heaven, hell, and the human realm – are as one. These images are recorded and actions as slim

as a silk thread are not missed. Thus it is said: “Deeds in a dark room, the god’s eyes are like lightening; the human realm’s secrets, heaven hears like thunder.” Mortals have already installed security cameras on earth to inspect and control each other and these cameras often capture people’s true actions. How could it be that heaven does not also have this equipment? People are below heaven and above earth and thus have no way to escape the surveillance cameras of heaven. Every action, every movement, every word, every deed is reflected in the enormous mirror of heaven. The flowers and trees in heaven represent the state of people’s spirits and can be observed by sages whose intelligent eyes are all-seeing. The purpose of self-cultivation is to learn how to cultivate this flower or tree and help it to bloom and fruit. On earth if you often have a happy heart then the state of your spirit in heaven will also be healthy. If you are bitter and impatient on earth your spirit will be withered in heaven and the leaves of your flower or tree will wilt and fall. Therefore, when people use their hearts and minds to improve their environment they will shed their shells and be encouraged to protect and nurture their lives. These people will then enjoy a bounteous harvest (the fruit of the Way).

Mr. Yang: Lord Dong Hua, how can people cultivate their spirits to fruition?

Lord Dong Hua: Flowers and trees have seeds which contain sprouts that are always the same as the parent flower or tree. This is exemplified in the saying, “As you sow so shall you reap.” Thus, people should attain cultivation and improve the quality of this seed to ensure that it will adapt to grow in any season or climate, can withstand storms without toppling, and can pass unharmed through repeated difficulties and trails by demons. This cultivation will unify the spirit, the seed will blossom, and the result of this “seed” is a fledging sage, gentleman, or novice monk. These beings are resolute without fail and remain detached from filth (passions, desires, emotions, and blame). They will not germinate again –thus escaping the cycle of life and death – by maintaining their standards. This is the Way of extended life and immortality, a nirvana of no death and no extinguishment. Therefore, while alive if one fails to escape the weights within one’s heart after death they will sink into hell. This is because the “you” of right now is also the “you” of later. People’s hearts and natures are not split and their form and appearance after life is still the same. Thus if people forgot all sorrow and heartache it would add immeasurably to my joy.

1. To not pursue goodness or to weakly pursue goodness is like shouldering 20,000 gold bricks. Even if you ascend to heaven – though the treasure covers your whole body – it has become a burden. In that state, you would not even have the heart to enjoy this beautiful eastern portion of heaven. Those who truly achieve the Way are able to completely rid themselves of all earthly matters. Thus they are carefree and comfortable. People actually arrive with nothing and leave with nothing and if you fail to let go of what you have grasped it becomes a “burden.” It is so foolish that people carry these heartaches and vexations with them after they die! When a leaf is yellow and withered it naturally falls to the ground. The tree is not reluctant to let it go because only then can the tree renew itself and resume growing again. Because all

living things arise from nothing they return to it. This is actually a main tenet of the great Way. External affairs are naught, so do not let them obstruct you. This is to be one with the Way.

2. Do not hang on evil or commit evil for a good cause. If one does good, the heart then grasps for good their entire life. To listen to the evil heart causes uneasiness and the true Way is lost. The heavenly mind is like the relationship between the sun and moon. Good and evil are not divided but are united as the sun and moon exist from the same light, a light that illuminates all things equally. If there was no evil we could not speak of good. Thus evil intentions are like a withered leaf falling to the dirt below and decaying. If one truly pursues cultivation in the Way (good) and its root (cause), good thoughts will arise naturally. After an evil person has been punished they must understand and follow good or they will be like a fallen leaf that never decays thus denying new life the chance to emerge. Plants must be watered and fertilized and only then can they grow abundantly. Thus the *Qing Jing Scripture* says, “Males are pure, females are impure; males are active, females are calm...purity is the source of impurity; activity is the foundation of calm.” The origin of heaven is the clear air above yet this pure air comes from the earth, an earth that originates from the *yin* mud. When *yin* reaches its pinnacle it gives birth to *yang* and when mud is ordered it becomes pure. Males originally have a pure body and females have an impure body. Yet although males have a pure body it is one that originates from an impure female body. Females are originally calm, yet they still descend from a father. Thus both *yin* and *yang* elements have an influence in the process of creation. Good and evil, pure and impure, active and calm; they are all opposites. If one commits evil even once this evil will take root and never be completely forgotten. The heart will bear this darkness to a hell that is unyielding and resolute. Yet if people “abandon evil” by forsaking their formerly evil ways and from this time forth do not return to evil they will escape from the path of evil.

Ji Gong: Lord Dong Hua is very kind and your teachings lay mysteries bare. Ancient virtue says, “One enlightened can disperse 100 years of work; one lamp can diffuse 1,000 years of darkness.” This means that one can be led to a new life. People should not always have to reside in a “hospital ward” atmosphere that is dark and gloomy. People should know that heaven is full of compassionate “nurses” and when these nurses approach to give you a shot, they are only trying to cure you. Thus people should not be afraid. The gods love earthly beings and will not intentionally let you suffer. The kings of hell are all immortals and bodhisattvas. These beings are like a stern father and loving mother. When they hit you or scold you it is only for your own good. You do not need to hate them or be scared of them. You need only to be more obedient and cheerfully and selflessly please these “elderly kings of hell”! The immortals and bodhisattvas of heaven are also the kings of hell, but they only look at your good deeds and this causes them to be much happier. Thus these beings appear benevolent and affable. Immortals and bodhisattvas were actually common people themselves once! Would you rather see parents who are angry or parents who are merciful? This is up to you! Heaven and hell are both located within your homes. Do

not think of them as too disparate; if hell is in front of you, heaven is directly behind. These words come from my heart and I hope that mortals will pay heed!

Mr. Yang: I cannot believe that I had not thought of this before. If one leaves home they will know how to return. If someone ascends to heaven they want to see that environment, if one descends to hell they would like to change their fate, and while in the human realm people should have a comfortable life. I believe that if people act like this it will not matter if they ascend to heaven, descend to hell, or come to the human realm because all will have a happy life. In heaven, it is all smiling faces while those in hell appear very sorrowful. In the human realm, happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy are all mixed. The condition of your mind before birth is the condition of your mind after death. People pass away but their minds do not. Thus life and death are one as good and evil are arise from the same origin. To grasp this is to know the Way!

Lord Dong Hua: What Mr. Yang has said is correct. In Chan Buddhist teachings one should not try for the two extremes but go directly to the source. Once you see something's true nature you will become a Buddha. If one does not question words, they will not understand these teachings. Because Mr. Yang is easily spiritually elevated he is able to travel to heaven, hell, and the human realm. This is certainly not by chance but is because you have a free heart. You should feel privileged to see these realms, what more could you ask for?

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Lord Dong Hua's praise. This is like a children's cartoon. It does not matter to children if what they are shown is real or not. When they are watching it they are happy and forget about those around them. They watch with great enjoyment and this is certainly their amusement park of ideas.

Lord Dong Hua: Ah ha! A great mystery is understood. The mind creates heaven, the mind creates hell. When the mind is happy it creates the Three Clarities from the kings of hell and when it is distressed it creates the kings of hell from the Three Clarities. Thoughts can open any world and you can become a carefree guest of heaven where you will never again sink into the depths of misery! Mr. Yang, let us now view the flowers and trees of original spirits belonging to the members of this congregation!

Mr. Yang: The color and appearance of these flowers and trees are all different. Hanging above them are signs with people's names written in Chinese, English, Japanese and other languages that I cannot read. It is truly a sight to behold. This tree here has the name of one of the congregation members from this temple. It has grown very robust and is full of fruit yet the leaves are sparse. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. Qiu's tree of original spirit. From this tree it is evident that his body has grown strong in the Way and his fruits of the Way are many. Yet the leaves are sparse and this is the area where he is lacking. If he adds water this tree will grow strong and new leaves will grow within the season.

Mr. Yang: This tree here has grown large and has lots of fruit. Yet the trunk has many knots and this tree has not produced many leaves. What does this represent?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. Hong's tree of original spirit. The leaves that he has are vibrant but the trunk has many knots which represents that sometimes his thoughts are unbalanced. The deeds (leaves)⁵⁰³ of the Way have already blossomed and with a round trunk this tree would be a perfect representation of the Way.

Mr. Yang: This tree here has grown very well yet half the leaves are lush, half are sparse, and the fruit on this tree is spoiling. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. His original form is like Ban Ping Mountain which covered in part by lush, green forests and in part by red earth. He must add water and dirt, only then will this tree become established. This tree represents that he has lost some knowledge of the Way and even though this tree is trying to grow new sprouts they have been neglected. I hope that this tree can be stimulated to grow again and when it has sprouted anew I will inform you.

Mr. Yang: This flower here has grown very large. It looks like a cockscomb. Why are some of the flowers on this plant withered and dropping to the ground?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. This flower does look like the cockscomb and is brilliantly red for a time. Yet the color of this flower has recently been changed due to a ferocious storm which it could not withstand. I hope that Mrs. (name omitted) will return to good, add water to, and cultivate her plant. Thus she will recover her previous vitality. If she does not do this it is too pitiful!

Mr. Yang: I do not know what this flower here is called. It has bloomed beautifully but the flowers are few in number and spread too far apart. Why is this?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. This flower was once healthy and it spread its seeds far and wide. Because it was watered often it flourished and thus you see the luxuriant flowers. The appearance of these flowers and trees are dictated by people's attitudes and behaviors. What is cultivated from the Way is dictated by what individuals sow and reap. Mrs. (name omitted)'s heart is steadfast and this is very admirable! Yet her work is extremely time-consuming and the cause of this has been that her children spend too much time alone. Look at this flower. Its seeds were spread too far and have not grown together. Likewise, when children have no supervision they are not behaved. If this is to be changed the family must spend more time together and then this violent nature will be curbed and the seed will naturally be guided to return to their own home.

⁵⁰³ This has a double meaning as deeds and leaves share the same pronunciation.

Ji Gong: Or time is now up and I must accompany Mr. Yang back to his temple. We will return at a later date. Please forgive our quick departure.

Lord Dong Hua: My time is also short and I must return. I will see you both back to the temple.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Dong Hua for sharing these heavenly secrets with us today. I will return at a later date to visit. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform, please master let us return to the temple!

Ji Gong: The Hall of the Sages and Worthies has already arrived. Mr. Yang, dismount off the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
December 31, 1979

14th Journey: Third Journey to the Dong Hua Palace...Inspection of the Flowers and Trees of Original Spirits

Poem: *The start of a one hundred foot pole is in the present. If one ascends a step they will become an immortal. Green trees in remote mountains bud new leaves. Those who cultivate themselves in the bustling city enjoy Eastern Heaven.*

Ji Gong: The entire world is filled with affectionate emotions. When you go to a restaurant, the owner greets you with a joyful face and offers you tea. When you go to the vegetable market to buy groceries, the seller gladly calls out a greeting. It does not matter if you are a good person or an evil person, these people will always act the same towards you as they truly have warm feelings for all around them. Perhaps some might say that these business people recognize money, not acquaintances, so what emotions do they truly have? Ha, ha! The world really is a place where “money creates people.” This may be a “reality” but if analytically considered, these merchants provide your vegetables and rice, ensure that you are warm and protected, and you give them money to ensure their successful livelihood. This interaction is quite natural. Heaven’s Way is truly selfless and although this may be a “reality” it is also “actually” how things are. How can you complain about this? If there were no such transactions how could the common person survive? One only needs to choose an occupation to be supplied with food, shelter, and other comforts. In this way one becomes two and so one. Thus it is said: “To obtain 10,000 things is to have it all.” The great Way developed from one and expanded to include everything; including the process of supply and demand. This demonstrates the inexhaustible power of the Way! Affectionate emotions are also emotions of the Way. Although it has been said that the great Way has no emotions, how could it give birth to the myriad things of this world and be without feelings? One only need look at the bodies that it has given to all living things – to which it gives constant attention and care – to see that the emotions of the Way are vast and magnanimous.

Mr. Yang: How is this?

Ji Gong: Isn’t the air that you breathe bestowed upon you from heaven above? It does not matter if you are a good or evil person; you are still given the same air to breathe. The same applies to the water that you are provided with and the earth that you walk on. Are these not given freely to everyone? Thus the heavens love everyone and their sentiments are deeply sympathetic to those on earth. If people love this universe they will follow its Way and all living things will then naturally enjoy the universe’s embrace. Birth and death are one and all will receive the universe’s compassion. If one did not view birth and death as natural would they be very optimistic? Today we are carrying out the edict to complete *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and our purpose is to open the hearts and minds of mortals and ensure that while they are

living on earth they will remember the pleasures of heaven. It is for this reason that we will continue our sacred journey, bring peace to all beings, and bring happiness to all humanity!

Mr. Yang: Master, these are miraculous words that you have spoken. I believe that when mortals hear these words they will feel them fall like a delightful rain!

Ji Gong: We should not delay our journey. Quickly climb aboard the lotus flower platform and we will again travel to the Dong Hua Palace!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated on the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at Dong Hua Palace. Let us greet Lord Dong Hua.

Mr. Yang: Greetings! Lord Dong Hua, I have again returned with my teacher. Please share you teachings and guidance with all people.

Lord Dong Hua: From ancient time to the present there have been stories of heaven and hell. Yet these tales were all void of content and vague, with not one that could accurately describe these locations. While some had enough heart to climb to heaven, those that did so could only grope about the entrance. Because people did not know what happened after death it represented only extinguishment. This caused many people that wished to follow the Way to lose hope. Thus mercy was extended from above and heaven is now being shown to the world. This assists those with some knowledge of the Way by providing them with a path to follow so that they no longer wander lost and have the means to achieve the utmost path. Therefore, this book *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* was created. This was not an easy matter, just as those that wish to pass through beautiful mountains and lakes must also endure the occasional thunder storm. People's roots must be refined and grow deep so that only their branches and leaves sway while the roots remain unmoving. Those that pursue cultivation in the Way must have an unyielding will and emulate the sun, moon, and stars who, after a violent wind, are still following their orbital paths. Thus these heavenly bodies are able to exist for a long time and if people pursue cultivation they will also have this ability. Today you have again come to this location and I will lead you to visit the flowers and trees of original spirits!

Mr. Yang: Thank you, Lord Dong Hua. Last time we saw some of the flowers and trees of original spirits that represent a few members of this congregation. Today I hope that we will be able to see more.

Lord Dong Hua: Okay! Please follow me.

Mr. Yang: These flowers and trees here represent the members of this congregation. Why are they all together?

Lord Dong Hua: Originally, the places that these people were born on earth were different. Yet because they have all entered this phoenix society of cultivation and worship Lord Guan, their flowers and trees naturally came together here. Thus it is said, “Similar objects are grouped together.” If people are fated, though thousands of miles apart, they will meet at the same place. Acquaintances and spouses all lived in different locations but they met together in this Phoenix hall to become a congregation and similarly the flowers and trees of their original spirits in heaven are all in the same garden.

Mr. Yang: This tree here is a member of the congregation’s tree of original spirit. It has many variegated leaves and the trunk has a thin crack. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)’s tree of original spirit. Mr. (name omitted) has crossed this sacred threshold and although he has the heart to work hard at cultivation in the Way he drives his car blissfully across crosswalks thus breaking the law. Today he is already middle-aged and I hope that he can make up for this deficiency and ensure that his tree is able to produce fruit.

Mr. Yang: This tree here is also a member of the congregation’s tree of original spirit. It has grown very large but all the leaves are red. Why does the top of the tree look like it has been chopped up with a hatchet and is leaking white sap?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)’s tree of original spirit. Since Mr. (name omitted) has entered this congregation’s sacred doors he has diligently participated in the Phoenix hall activities. Thus his tree is very large and has produced much fruit. Yet Mr. (name omitted) drinks too much liquor, therefore the leaves of his tree are fire red and he has already strayed from the correct path. Today he is in the hospital for his mistakes and his tree of original spirit has also been injured. I hope that Mr. (name omitted) will be able to understand this mortal life and not topple his tree through these injurious activities. He can still be saved from death but this really depends on if he receives protection from the gods. Heaven loves all mortals and certainly does not want to harm people. All things are dictated by cause and effect and if one pursues cultivation they will create a strong foundation of roots!

Mr. Yang: This tree here has grown very large and strong but the branches are not straight. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)’s tree of original spirit. Mr. (name omitted) is full of strength and vitality thus his tree is flourishing. Its branches have grown crooked from its trunk which is this beautiful tree’s flaw. These crooked branches resulted from a split in the family and if the root and branches can come together and grow straight then the descendants will obtain immeasurable fortune!

Mr. Yang: Why does this tree here have no leaves yet have so many branches? It looks like a thousand-armed Goddess of Mercy.

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. His tree has no leaves but many branches and does look like a thousand-armed Goddess of Mercy. With this many branches he can nurture those in all directions but he can also grow into areas that are none of his concern. Although this tree could grow larger still, it would produce more branches without leaves, which is like a person with no clothes. I am afraid that if this tree sustained any injuries it would have a hard time defending itself. I hope that he is able to cultivate himself and grow some green leaves which will shade his descendants.

Mr. Yang: This tree of original spirit has grown extremely large and it has lots of fruit. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. After entering these sacred doors he has changed his evil ways and has been assigned as a Phoenix hall assistant. He works quietly and thus his tree has grown very quickly. He has no real faults and therefore this tree reflects his great achievements.

Mr. Yang: This tree of original spirit is stout and strong yet the leaves are yellow and there is a fissure in the trunk. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is because ever since Mr. (name omitted) entered these sacred halls the only contribution he has made is to attend the recitation of scriptures. These yellow leaves represent that his roots are aging and the trunk is cracked because he has too many burdens. I hope that he is able to rouse himself, focus, and intently pursue restorative cultivation or he will not make the arduous journey to the halls of heaven.

Mr. Yang: This tree here is withered but it still appears to have much strength and it has produced pure fruit. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. Since Mr. (name omitted) has entered these sacred doors he has diligently studied truth, accepted insult without complaint, spirit is excellent, if he can continue diligently, not stray from the path, then at a later date he will achieve the fruits of the Way.

Mr. Yang: This tree here has my name hanging over it. What is its status?

Lord Dong Hua: Your tree has deep roots and lush leaves. Right now it is a dark green, flourishing, and it has already produced many fruits of the Way which are soon to ripen. If you are able to continue sharing the news of heaven with one heart and one mind I only have one thing to say, "Your merit will be immeasurable."

Ji Gong: Our time is short and I must guide Mr. Yang back to his temple. We will return to visit at a later date.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Lord Dong Hua's direction today. I bid you farewell.

Lord Dong Hua: I will accompany you back to your temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
January 1, 1980

15th Journey: Fourth Journey to the Dong Hua Palace...Inspection of the Flowers and Trees of Original Spirits

Poem: *Outstanding life naturally stems from heaven's Way. The utmost truth joins immortals from all locations. The heavenly peach orchard is beautiful. Jade trees and golden flowers are the utmost glory.*

Ji Gong: Although saving mankind is thought of as only the concern of immortals and bodhisattvas, it is actually the responsibility of all mortals. It is only when mortals save mortals that the Way will be complete. When the Hall of the Sages and Worthies completes *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*, all people who do not distribute and study these words will not receive help from the immortals and bodhisattvas! Since ancient times, successful cultivation has always been the responsibility of the individual and if you are able to understand truth and the path to cultivation then the road to heaven is evident before you. These people do not need guidance from immortals or bodhisattvas but can easily return home. If immortals and bodhisattvas forcefully dragged people to heaven, these beings would not be accustomed to this place. It would not take many days for these people to slip away and become lost. Therefore, the cultivated should first become accustomed to the carefree existence in heaven while on earth by letting go of all obstructions and worries within their minds. Only thus will they return to heaven and be adapted to this environment. If this is not done, it will be more painful to live in heaven than on earth and if you are not prepared it is better that you are reincarnated. I hope that all people will open their minds and that those cultivated will not reject these teachings. Otherwise, when they arrive in heaven they will see the many cultivated followers of these teachings in heaven and they will feel very shameful. This will cause their spirit to be vexed and fall away. Thus, while in the human realm you should commit good deeds and in heaven you will never encounter situations in which you feel awkward. Those cultivated pursue vitality, the joyful Way, good life, and friendship. Yet it is only when they embrace evil people that they will transcend this mortal world. If they fail to do so, how can they be a part of heaven? Our time to travel to the halls of heaven has arrived. Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform. Today we will again visit the Dong Hua Palace.

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at Dong Hua Palace. Let us greet Lord Dong Hua.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! Lord Dong Hua, I have arrived with my teacher Ji Gong. Today we have again come to disturb you, please forgive us!

Lord Dong Hua: You are both welcome here. This Dong Hua realm has already been shared with mortals on earth and I hope that all people long to come here. The last time you were here I took Mr. Yang to see the flowers and trees of original spirits. There are still parts of the garden that we have not seen so today I will guide Mr. Yang to view these sections!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Lord Dong Hua's kindness. Do not waste your time explaining the origin of the trees and flowers of original spirits to me. We have already arrived in the garden and although it is filled with flowers and trees of all appearances it looks like a very peaceful environment!

Lord Dong Hua: Although these flowers and trees are all different, they are all rich in life like those flowers and trees only found deep within nature.

Mr. Yang: This tree of original spirit is of medium stature yet it appears very firm and has lots of fruit. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. Ever since Mr. (name omitted) entered these sacred doors he has diligently revered the sages, fulfilled his duties to the utmost, and has had an unyielding nature. Though his tree has lush leaves and lots of fruit, it has recently weathered some brutal storms that have worn it down. I hope that he will remain resolute and not lose his wisdom of the Way. The wealth of this world is for those whom are fated; individuals must pursue the body of the Way.

Mr. Yang: This tree of original spirit is enormous and its leaves are lush, yet it has little fruit and what fruit it does possess is immature. Will it produce much fruit in the future?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. Mr. (name omitted) is an intelligent person whose disposition is temperate. After entering these sacred doors he has diligently pursued merit and although he has not yet had any great achievements, he understands original truth and is not careless in his discussion of the Way. His fruit of the Way in the future will be limitless.

Mr. Yang: This tree of original spirit is of medium stature. Although it has many branches and leaves its leaves are covered with black spots and though the tree is blossoming there is no fruit. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. Though Mr. (name omitted) has attained cultivation, his earlier mistakes have not yet been washed cleaned and he sometimes he still commits these evil acts. This action adds to his demerits and before it's too late I hope that he discards this harmful behavior and enthusiastically pursues cultivation. If he does so, fruit will be produced and the road

ahead will appear smooth. Heaven certainly pays heed to people's virtuous desires. Mr. Yang, you should look again at some of the flowers!

Mr. Yang: Okay! I will look at some flowers and divulge some information for the female devotees. This old flower patch here is extremely dense and it looks a little like the reishi mushroom.⁵⁰⁴ What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. Since Mrs. (name omitted) has entered these sacred doors she has worked earnestly, quietly pursued cultivation, talks simply, and has a resolute mind. When the demons arrive to test her she will surely endure. She is very loyal to the sages and gods and the result is that her flower appears like the immortal reishi mushroom. I hope that she will continue to cultivate herself and achieve excellent results.

Mr. Yang: This flower patch here has grown very large and its branches and leaves are growing well. Why is this?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. Mrs. (name omitted) lives in Zhanghua yet she diligently attends every Phoenix session. She has studied the true Way and does not just care about herself. It may be said that she has the knowledge of a scholar. Thus, her flower is very robust and full of seeds. If she can continue cultivation without rest she will produce true fruit.

Mr. Yang: This flower patch here is enormous and there are many flowers but the plant appears droopy. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. Ever since Mrs. (name omitted) entered these doors she has devoutly pursued cultivation, yet she has still fallen short. Like a flower that is unable to produce and distribute its seeds she is unable to focus her thoughts. I hope that she can collect herself. To attain cultivation she only needs muster a little bit more sincerity as everything else she does is wasted action.

Mr. Yang: This flower patch has grown very robust and it has many buds but they have not yet matured. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. Ever since Mrs. (name omitted) entered these doors she has earnestly studied the Way. Her intelligence is outstanding and her roots of goodness are deep. Yet her fruit of the Way is not yet ripe and I hope that she will continue to pursue cultivation.

Mr. Yang: This flower here has grown off by itself and it looks extremely delicate. What does this mean?

⁵⁰⁴ *Ganoderma lucidum* is a dark brown fungus that is thought to possess supernatural powers.

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. Ever since Mrs. (name omitted) entered these doors she has pursued cultivation. Yet because her marriage is not going well she endures a lonely life. This is the effect of something she did in a previous life and cannot be changed. She should keep diligently pursuing truth and act according to her cultivation, thus she will naturally return to the light.

Mr. Yang: This flower here is very bright but some of its branches are broken. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mrs. (name omitted)'s flower of original spirit. Mrs. (name omitted) has deep roots of intelligence but the season for blossoms has passed and the flowering branches are broken. If the roots can be stimulated through the diligent pursuit of cultivation these flowers have the opportunity to become as the willow branch that sits in Guanyin's vase. This will sprinkle the water of salvation on all people!

Mr. Yang: As I look at this other tree of original spirit it is tall and thick. The leaves are lush and it is producing fruit. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. He has toiled diligently in this sacred hall and you could say that he is one of this temple's original members. He often quietly repairs this temple and has amassed lots of merit. I hope that he will continue diligently and receive many fruits of the Way.

Mr. Yang: This tree of original spirit is of medium stature. It has many leaves and green fruit. What does this mean?

Lord Dong Hua: This is Mr. (name omitted)'s tree of original spirit. Ever since Mr. (name omitted) entered these sacred doors he has worked diligently and enthusiastically completed his official tasks. These acts have produced fruit which has not yet ripened. I hope that he will continue to be diligent! Today our tour of the flowers and trees of original spirits has come to a conclusion. Those which we have not yet revealed will be described at a later date. Those described above are only included for people's reference. To succeed or fail at cultivation depends on the individual. When the good cease pursuing cultivation they deteriorate. When the evil are willing to pursue cultivation they will achieve results. This is like planting flowers and trees. When you tend to your garden it will obviously grow. I hope that those pursuing cultivation will not lack will. As soon as you lack will, flowers and trees are not cared for and it is not long before weeds spread and flowers and trees lose light. This leads to people's roots that are feeble and no longer produce fruit.

Mr. Yang: Lord Dong Hua saves mortals and offers so much compassion in caring for the state of original spirits. This hard work will yield much merit!

Lord Dong Hua: All things originated from me and we share the same breath, good times and bad. Look at the oxygen produced by flowers and trees; it is consumed by humanity while the carbon dioxide that they emit is absorbed by flowers and trees. All of these beings live on earth and each take what they need from each other. The reciprocal benefit that living beings derive from each other is unimaginable! If you say that I care for sentient beings then you must also say that sentient beings “beseech greater fortune.” Although the entire world does not speak the same language, with a look at someone’s face you can know what is in their heart. This is non-verbal communication. The flower blooms because it knows that it is spring and when the leaves begin to fall you know that autumn is approaching. The mute do not speak but can still use hand signals to express their desires. Thus, they too are competent at communication. Wind, rain, thunder, lightening, and changes in the stars reveal what is in heaven’s heart. Thus wise and good people watch these phenomena. To share these words that “reveal what is in the heart”⁵⁰⁵ will lead people to a peaceful environment and I will now give proof of this fact as I again guide Mr. Yang to view the original state of all living beings.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Dong Hua, for your compassion. People are very fortunate to hear your kind words and they will certainly strike a sympathetic chord. I hope that people will receive this message and follow its righteous Way to unsurpassed truth!

Lord Dong Hua: Heaven is the father and mother and people (seed) are created from the bodies of the gods. To know people is to know heaven. Heaven (mother/father) hopes that its sons and daughters mind their parents. Yet even if the children commit a crime and descend to hell (jail) to receive punishment, when they return these children will still receive a sumptuous banquet and all will be forgiven. Therefore, people should not think that heaven is too far away. Even if your entire body is consumed with evil, so long as you can start anew and sprout a fresh seed, heaven will welcome you back. I will now share detailed information with all living beings – many of whom are diligently pursuing cultivation – whether they are completely enlightened, only know half of the truth, or know nothing at all. Mr. Yang, follow me!

Mr. Yang: I follow behind Lord Dong Hua and we travel a great distance. Suddenly there appears a group of people leisurely floating before me. Some are sitting below trees in meditation and some are traveling to and fro. Each person has a happy expression on their face and rays of light shoot that forth from their heads. These beings appear to not have a single worry and I am very envious! Lord Dong Hua, what manner of immortals are these?

Lord Dong Hua: These are mortals that have achieved cultivation. After they have been enlightened in the great Way they return to the heaven of the Five Elders and augment their spherical *qi* with lots of light. These beings then transcend the three

⁵⁰⁵ This compound word 開心 also means “happy.”

realms, become one with the rotating sphere of essence, and reveal their original appearance.

Mr. Yang: I have heard Lord Dong Hua's description that the great Way's utmost limits are this mysterious and spherical essence. Yet why do the eight immortals often appear in this mortal world? Is it that their skill in the Way is not equal to the rotating sphere of essence?

Lord Dong Hua: The mysteries of heaven cannot be revealed in this brief discussion. The eight immortal's skill in the Way is equivalent to the rotating sphere of essence. As the Buddha said, "Everything is connected." Yet as the eight immortals are able to join together with the rotating ball of essence they are also able to separate from it. Therefore, the meaning of joining together with the Wu Ji essence (great Way) is not that you are under the Wu Ji's control but that you are able to separate from and meld with the Wu Ji at will. Those that have attained the rank of immortal, gentleman, sage, or Buddha can travel freely between religious realms. If one can place material things and the needs of the physical body aside they are practicing the teaching, "My heart does not grasp material things. I am only obstructing my way by surrounding myself with material things." After these beings have departed from the dark and mysterious sphere of essence they can live independently. They are thus like a child that has grown. Although the child has parents, it does not rely on their support and has the ability to live its own. The great Way is not just one teaching, "The six⁵⁰⁶ are brought together; volumes of hidden secrets." After they have achieved the rank of immortal, gentleman, sage, or buddha, though they have already separated from the mysterious and spherical essence, these beings think about all of the sentient beings that have not yet been saved. Therefore, they still live within the boundaries of this world and often travel about these palaces to be closer to mortal beings and to save those that have been fated for rescue. These beings also assist in the spirit-writing process to enlighten people, return to earth to be reborn, and harness the vessel of mercy etc. while living a Daoist or Buddhist life. Those who have truly attained cultivation have this magnanimous desire to save others and believe that cultivation is, "In order to save mortals, not to escape commoners. It is to be closer to all beings, not to be farther from them." Only people with this goal are fit to be the teachers of sentient beings. When a high-ranking, high-paid official takes off his imperial robes has he not become a common person? Therefore, when speaking of an immortal, gentleman, sage, or Buddha's "given name" it is truly only an "alias." If mortals heard that they are this immortal or that Buddha they would just shake in fear and not dare to be near them! If mortals are afraid of immortals and Buddhas they will stay away from them and lose their opportunity to become enlightened from their teachings. Thus their chance to become an immortal or Buddha themselves has decreased. Those people who will truly become an immortal or Buddha will look for the opportunity to be near all sentient beings and save these beings because they hope that all mortals will enjoy the same life that they do. Therefore, the immortals and sages that you have seen today

⁵⁰⁶ This refers to the six major religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

have an extraordinary spirit and light of the Way. When they arrive at this location their “spiritual vitality” is boosted so that it is bright and full and they can attain the “original five *qi*” paradise. Once these beings have attained the Way and possess infinite skill, they can separate from the rotating sphere of essence and save sentient beings. Therefore, the additional cultivation attained at this location is like the “in-service training” that mortals receive at work on earth. This prepares these beings for other environments, ensures that they will have no fear while undergoing hardships, and allows them to work freely and easily.

Mr. Yang: What process do those who are cultivated take and what augments their spirits?

Lord Dong Hua: Let us proceed forward. I will find one who is cultivated, has already transcended the three realms, and represents the nature of the Way and you can query him on these details. This will allow you to lay out the path to cultivation for all sentient beings on earth, allowing them to shed their mortal bodies and ascend to the halls of heaven!

Mr. Yang: A light emits from these solemn immortals and sages who engender respect. Yet these beings also exude an affable aura. Golden Immortal, can you please share your experiences on earth and after death with me?

Golden Immortal: Mr. Yang, it is good that you have arrived. You bear the extraordinary responsibility of saving sentient beings and completing this exceptional book *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. I will take this opportunity to share my story. While on earth I was a merchant named Zhan. From childhood, I had much respect for the immortals and buddhas and I enjoyed looking through Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist morality books. Through the guidance of a friend I found a teacher and studied the Way. This teacher taught me to see that the world is an illusion. After being enlightened as to the cycle of life and death I was extremely excited and from this time on I had a more elevated view towards life. I then vowed to save sentient beings, print and distribute all manner of morality books, and aid the poor. I energetically adhered to these practices and accumulated merit. One day while reading a scripture I found the passage, “Though one achieves a name, nothing has been obtained.” This opened my mind and the affairs I had been holding on to for the last five or six years were suddenly let go. While earlier I held the false view that I had already “obtained enlightenment” and I deeply believed that after departing this life I had a destination, I was still searching for answers. Ever since I read that section, “Though one achieves a name, nothing has been obtained” I constantly asked myself, “What Way have I attained?” My two hands hold nothing, what have I achieved? The Way is the truth of nature and all things are endowed with the nature of the Way. I then realized that these phenomena could be revealed and once I had this breakthrough concerning the false form of the body my original heart and nature were free to join with all things in the universe. I then became a hard-working Buddhist and every word that was uttered from my mouth was the word of the gods. While I helped myself I

became more helpful to the sentient beings around me and those who were sick were immediately cured upon hearing my words. Immortals and Buddhas from otherworldly realms came to listen when I spoke. Thus to “obtain enlightenment” is only a label. Sentient beings are foolish and if they are not given a name they do not know where to begin cultivation. This is like one that crosses the sea in a boat and attempts to keep this boat when he reaches the other shore, it must be let go! Ever since I became aware of these truths I individually practiced them and shared my knowledge with other sentient beings. My interpretations of the scriptures were all according to this principle and at that time there were many who believed. Yet some rigid practioners from previous generations would often contradict my instruction believing that I had violated Buddhist conventions. These elders were shackled by their religion and unable to ask for emancipation. During this time the Fifth Patriarch Huang Mei said to the future Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng,⁵⁰⁷ “One should activate the mind without dwelling on anything.”⁵⁰⁸ This caused a great realization, in which I was again enlightened and purified, and I attempted that which the *Qing Jing Scripture* states, “One should be pure and calm, while gradually entering the true Way; because the true Way has been entered, a name has been attained.” In other words, if those cultivated want the ability to enter the domain of truth, they will also have the ability to enter the domain of the true Way. Those who will not accept the restrictions of control are those who are truly “enlightened”! While on earth, I pursued this vein of enlightenment and cleared my mind and vision. This is like the Sixth Patriarch Huineng’s statement: “Fundamentally no tree of wisdom exists, nor the stand of a bright mirror; since all originates from emptiness, where can the dust settle?” Yet Shen Xiu⁵⁰⁹ had previously written: “The body is the tree of wisdom, the mind is a bright mirror in a stand; take care to diligently wipe it, allow no dirt to cling.” These sayings are similar as one talks of nothing (emptiness) and one talks of something (form). If mortals grasp nothing they will become enlightened as, “The atmosphere contains mysteries and originated from one. Form and emptiness are the same.” As this implies, one should not cling to the two extremes but should choose the middle Way. Therefore, the flowers and trees of original spirits at the Dong Hua Palace are actually these “trees of wisdom”. Although they exist, they are like a movie which can be seen but not touched. This principle is called the “body of light,” “body of shadow,” or “dharma body.”⁵¹⁰ These bodies are like the light or the wind which cannot be touched but actually have tremendous strength. Before I passed away, I already felt that my “true self” had departed from my “false self.” This felt like I was shedding clothes from my body and after these old clothes were discarded my mind and spirit was more lively and carefree than before. Because I was no longer wrapped in heavy clothing, I had no “burdens” and my body was light. I then clearly saw the

⁵⁰⁷ 六祖慧能 lived from 638-713CE and his teachings were compiled into *The Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*.

⁵⁰⁸ This exhortation can be found in the *Scripture of the Golden Pagoda* (金剛經).

⁵⁰⁹ Shen Xiu was the head monk at the Fifth Patriarch’s temple and wrote this poem hoping to be ordained as the Sixth Patriarch, a position that was awarded to Hui Neng after the Fifth Patriarch read his poem.

⁵¹⁰ Dharma body (法身) is also the term for the Dharmakaya.

natural order of things and as a bright light my body flew through the southern gate of heaven, past the examination gate, and to the bright and sacred path. I then passed smoothly while proceeding in the Way.

Mr. Yang: When listening to your account it sounds like cultivation is a beautiful and carefree affair. I admire you without limits but how did you attain residency at the Dong Hua Palace?

Golden Immortal: You too have already attained this paradise; you just do not see its deepest mysteries. To become cultivated is to seek to liberate your mind and please your spirit. Obviously during this process of cultivation you will receive countless tests and encounter difficulties but these tests are one form of training. Moreover, it is not the wish of heaven that we are obstructed. If you wish to achieve an unyielding and multi-purpose metal body it must be forged by the blacksmith's hammer or it will not become a useful tool. Thus it is said, "If the penetrating frost does not arrive, how will the plum blossoms greet the nose with their fragrance?" Therefore, the colder it is the more fragrant it will be and the more one is smelt the more unyielding they will be. Within the Dong Hua Palace all five *qi* can be cultivated but the most ubiquitous is the cyan *qi*. Cultivation in the five *qi* will ensure that one has strength in the Way. This is like increasing one's horsepower from one thousand to three thousand and will allow you to come and go freely between worlds. Within this benevolent heaven Lord Dong Hua resides and manages his affairs. This locale is completely covered with cyan *qi* and one only needs to sit in meditation to be totally covered with Dong Hua's spirit. After one's spirit is full you can ascend through the three realms.

Lord Dong Hua: The refinement of the spirit is a process that begins within each individual. Although you can say that the Dong Hua *qi* covers this location it is actually within those who are cultivated and it is through their "realization" that this *qi* appears. When these beings cross the boundary into this locale they slowly start to feel its mysteries and find that their own body can also emit this divine and wonderful *qi*. Mortals are not stupid. If you tell them that they can use chopsticks to eat, they will practice and learn how to use them. All things are controlled or attempted to be controlled by people and there is no action that they cannot learn, especially after their spirit is separated from their bodies and they are less restrained. Some learn at a slower pace and some more quickly. During this period of salvation, those who are cultivated and have a sincere heart – though they may not be completely perfect – will attain a higher and more profound realm of existence through the guidance of the very intelligent teachers here. The cultivated should not confine themselves to the conventional way or carry too much prejudice or their spirit will slow and they will have no means of "separating from the body." That type of cultivation is like the lonely path of an emperor or the road to death. I hope that all people will open a "large and wide road" that extends in all directions. When people arrive at this location they can rest, reside here, and travel without hindrance. One should also ensure that the person traveling behind you achieves salvation. This is a sacred responsibility and is certainly not child's play! The Golden Immortal to whom you just spoke has achieved cultivation and transcended the human realm. The results that he has achieved are

above that of a common person and although he is called a “golden immortal” he is actually a “Buddha”.

Mr. Yang: Are the tests in life asked for by people or given by heaven?

Lord Dong Hua: The immortals and Buddhas that have ascended to heaven must pass through tests. In the flesh there is a desire for wine, women, and fortune. The most important aspect of these trials is that the heart of those tested remains firm and is not tempted. Thus the light of their heart will become stronger and they will be more resilient to temptations. These beings are like a well-built house which the wind and rain cannot harm. Heaven above gives them the opportunity to be tested which allows their spirit to become more stable. Therefore, their heart will be unyielding and resolute whether they enter the Five Elder’s Heaven, the Three Clarities Heaven, the rotating sphere of essence, or any other heaven that a spirit could enter. These beings have truly attained the Way. Thus it is said: “Bustling streets refine a guest, chaos tests a cultivated person.” Immortals, Buddhas, gentleman, and sages must endure these tests because heaven wants to give them the opportunity to refine themselves. It is only the self that will hold one back and it is not external forces which are sent to torment. Therefore, a “demon’s test” is only a “Buddhist exam” and these trials are both something that “heaven bestows” and “people summon.” In brief, heaven wishes to protect all spirits and ensure that all people coming and going are protected and healthy. Thus people are educated and trained through tests. Because all living beings are originally from the same body heaven’s mercy and kindness towards these beings is infinite.

Mr. Yang: What Lord Dong Hua says is correct. Why are people on earth forced to endure all manner of hardships? Does one who is missing a limb still have the qualifications to be cultivated in the Way?

Lord Dong Hua: People have been called the spirit of all beings and therefore it is people who can most easily attain cultivation. The marvelous birds and various beasts that inhabit this heavenly realm are beings who experienced trials and difficulties in previous lives and achieved a measure of cultivation. All manner of beings possess emotions and should pursue cultivation and salvation. Therefore, if one’s limbs are not whole this should not be an obstruction to pursuing the Way and one has even more reason to assist this being in their pursuit of cultivation. They should not be abandoned! Otherwise, one has violated the universe’s law of compassion for all sentient beings which is a foolish action. Those beings who receive all manner of trials and difficulties should look both to the evil actions that they have committed in this lifetime as well as the karmic repercussions of actions in their previous lives. As I said a moment ago, immortals, Buddhas, gentleman, and sages must endure tests while safeguards their quality. In order for people to enter heaven above they obviously must exert themselves to climb. The various sins that people commit before they are enlightened cling to the body and do not let go. They are always there seeking an opportunity to consequence because what you owe must be completely repaid. Yet if

one has not yet attained enlightenment and they are able to open their heart those obstructions will very quickly disappear. The light that emanates from the heart can eliminate all evil and can illuminate future pitfalls and disasters. People have accumulated karma from their previous lives which must be compensated. While expelling these evil elements people may need an injection and they will feel pain yet they cannot complain because the trials that you face will rid your spirit of evil and assist your ascent to heaven. When you see cattle grazing or being whipped by people they appear abused and pitiful yet even they must recompense for karma from previous lives and undergo a life of trials. Cattle are also on the path to cultivation! Dogs eat human excrement and rotten vegetables but they guard the gates to homes and temples and are loyal. Though dogs have little, they are still slowly pursuing a life of cultivation. People today live so comfortably. They have food, shelter, are nurtured, and have everything they need. Yet they must continue to diligently work and only then can they attain this joyful realm. One should quickly attain cultivation and achieve a more beautiful life. Do not get caught in a whirlpool of wine, women, and wealth and become stuck as a common mortal forever. I hope that people will listen to what I have said, cultivate their strength, and return to this Dong Hua realm.

Ji Gong: We are grateful for Lord Dong Hua's guidance and the profound assistance to all sentient beings. We bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Dong Hua for your teachings. To hear so many heavenly teachings today was like being given a precious treasure. You have been very kind and your assistance to all people is limitless.

Lord Dong Hua: This is my responsibility and joy.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform and we will prepare to return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: I am sitting aboard the lotus flower platform, please let us return!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
January 16, 1980

16th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Nan Hua Palace... Teachings of Holy Lord Nan Hua

Poem: Cold wind shakes green cedars. The sound of instruction crashes like ten-thousand ten-foot waves. The spirit of Xuan Zang has been recovered. Merit approaches many ancient ancestors.

Ji Gong: The record of the monk Xuan Zang's journey west explains that he went through many trails and difficulties before reaching his goal. Today, we are writing *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* in order to instruct the world and this undertaking is much like Xuan Zang's journey to retrieve Buddhist sutras. While traveling westward he was ambushed by a myriad of monsters and demons who wanted to hinder Xuan Zang's progress. Because Xuan Zang was successful in his journey to retrieve Buddhist sutras, the teachings of Buddhism were spread to the world. Though surrounded by demons who threatened to take his life, the eye of heaven was watching and those on the correct path are protected on all sides. Even though the monkey Sun Wugong can change into seventy-two different forms, he still was unable to escape from the grasp of the Buddhist Xuan Zang. Although wicked behavior and evil *qi* may promulgate for a time, it is always eliminated in the end for violating heaven. Because heaven is merciful and wishes to save all sentient beings it has bestowed upon them this precious book and has given them numerous sacred scriptures. Although Xuan Zang was tested by demons he was protected by heaven. Those people who wish to harm others are not sent by heaven yet for a time obstructions are able to hinder good people. Thus it is difficult to attain cultivation in the great Way and this has been the case since ancient times. I hope that all sages and worthies will attain a sincere heart and courageously march forward into the west. The time to travel to heaven has arrived. Mr. Yang, prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting. Please teacher, take off! To what location are we traveling today?

Ji Gong: Today we will travel to the Nan Hua Palace and visit Lord Nan Hua... We have already arrived at the Nan Hua Palace, let us proceed forward to pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: The scenery here is extraordinarily beautiful yet everything is red. There are beautiful flowers and strange trees which are enormous and I feel like everything is baking. Ahead there is a palace with a sign on it that says Nan Hua Palace. Why are there hot flames of *qi* shooting out toward us?

Ji Gong: The furnace of Nan Hua produces lots of red *qi*. Thus you have this feeling. Let us proceed forward and pay our respects to Lord Nan Hua!

Mr. Yang: Okay! When entering the palace I see a large deity with a red face sitting in the middle. A heat emits from this being and I feel very warm and as if my *qi* has increased by one hundred times. Greetings Lord Nan Hua!

Lord Nan Hua: You are welcome! Today the Hall of the Sages and Worthies' Mr. Yang has arrived with his teacher Ji Gong to the Nan Hua realm. On behalf of all sentient beings I am very pleased to ensure that people know how to cultivate their bodies and support their souls. I would like to reveal the great Way of this Nan Hua realm in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* to heaven's honored guests. This will change the incorrect thoughts and actions of mortals and ensure that all people are able to follow the principles of nature. It does not matter if one travels to the north, south, east or west, all are able to attain a heavenly nature and actions. I will also ensure that nothing is neglected and the wrong path is not taken. When I reveal the profound realizations of the great Way of Nan Hua only then will one not be confused by external forms and passions. I hope that those people who are wandering lost will find an intersection and stop to listen to my words.

Mr. Yang: Lord Nan Hua, please explain the details of this realm and provide your guidance to all sentient beings.

Lord Nan Hua: This is my responsibility which I will certainly not decline. As sentient beings' original spirits were originally from the same body they should all be saved. I am one of the Five Elders, I reside in the southern heaven of fire, and I have been called the "seed of red vitality." On the human body I have jurisdiction over the heart. As bright red blood flows quickly through veins and supports human life with each beat it demonstrates the vitality of Nan Hua's work. Human life is not possible away from fire. In ancient times, flint or the rubbing together of sticks was used to make fire but times have changed. A fire made from flint goes out quickly and the firewood of Elder Wood gradually absorbs water. A kerosene lamp does not burn bright and electric light has now been created. Fire represents light in places that have none. All things disappear in the frightening darkness which is a place where evil gathers. Today I will take this "sacred fire" and illuminate all beings under heaven dispelling their dark thoughts and assisting them to avoid pitfalls. Some people open the window to their heart and allow others to see their true intentions. If you have this type of courage, you have already obtained the red *qi* of Nan Hua and your health and salvation in the Way is ensured. Because the *qi* of fire dissipates poison and kills bacteria, when you open your heart any concealed seeds of evil intention will be illuminated and no longer become an illness. If there is a red light at an intersection you cannot proceed forward. If you do not obey this law you could cause someone's blood to flow which is a violation of a principle of the Nan Hua fire. You should carefully watch yourself and not shed others blood. How should sentient beings cultivate themselves according to the way of Nan Hua? The heavens of the Five Elders each appears in its own form. Within these five forms and five *qi* only those who are being refined have the qualifications to return here. Those people with a fiery nature

will burn down their flower or tree of original spirit. Likewise, those people who leave the light of fire become lost in the dark and lose their way. There is a saying, “He who nears vermillion becomes red; he who nears ink becomes black.” Therefore, those who depart from the red *qi* (true *qi*) of Nan Hua will enter a dark path and how will they know how to return?

Mr. Yang: What Lord Nan Hua has said is true. Your merit is vast and I am ready to hear more of your miraculous teachings!

Lord Nan Hua: Nan Hua is the vitality of the south. I reside in the heaven of the Five Elders and south is the position of the heaven of fire. The “seed of fire” found here is the “secret and true fire.” If, at the initial creation of original spirits, I had not provided fire I am afraid that there would have been no way to complete these sacred spirits or create all living beings. Thus I say that my spirit exists in all locations that have fire. Fire is a driving force for life and innovation. If there was not the driving force of “fire” then “strength” would not occur. People born on this earth spread to every direction and evidenced that in the south there is life, in the north there is death. I am in charge of the heart and blood vessels in the human body. If the heart beats too excessively it stops and people return to a state of death (as in the north there is water, the deceased body becomes ice-cold).

Mr. Yang: Lord Nan Hua, how did you originate?

Lord Nan Hua: I originated with the Three Clarities and was born of fire, thus I am called the seed of fire. All “fire light” on earth originates from my body. The *qi* of fire is the hot *qi* of summer and it represents a period of exuberant growth for all living things. Life begins in the spring but grows during the summer. Therefore, if you have spring without summer, though life will begin, it will have no opportunity to grow. “Fire” is a valuable treasure to carry along. Don’t matches, electric lamps, rice-cookers, stoves, cigarette lighters all rely on fire? These things ensure that people will have a life of convenience. Trolleys, automobiles, trains, steamboats, rice-cookers, etc. all use “electricity or fire” to run. Thus the saying, “Flash of light and spark of fire.” Right now there is a lack of crude oil which is burned to produce power. One should know that “fire” is the source of all energy and is also the power of heat, movement, and life.

Mr. Yang: Elder Fire is the embodiment of light and if you were lost to the world all would be dark. The “merits of fire” are vast and limitless. How should mortals practice these “merits of fire” and attain cultivation?

Lord Nan Hua: I am not full of merit. My “presence” has brought infinite light and life to the world. This bright light renews all life and lights the way for all beings, guiding them from confusion. The *qi* of the Five Elders is bestowed upon all people. Because people are not able to protect their *qi* they are deficient in some areas. Today,

I will pay special attention to the “ritual” *qi* and ensure the salvation of all living beings.

Teachings omitted due to redundancy.

The teachings above reveal the *qi* of fire. Fire can both benefit and harm people. One should use these teachings with their whole heart. I will lead you to visit the mysteries of the Nan Hua realm!

Mr. Yang: Thank you for Lord Nan Hua’s guidance. I am ready to see the mysterious Nan Hua realm. I follow Lord Nan Hua because I would like to delve into this deep universe and see the prodigious workmanship of its creators. ... We arrive and I look around. There is a red light emanating from every direction. On one side there is a mountain shooting fire and spewing magma. Isn’t this a volcano?

Lord Nan Hua: Correct, this is Fire Mountain. This magma is the essence of “fire” and is also called “geothermal energy”. Nan Hua is where I reside and this realm fills every location with the *qi* of fire. If the *qi* of fire vanished, this Nan Hua realm would freeze and change color. People should not fear being burned by fire because this is also part of the cultivation process for all sentient beings. The world’s volcanoes and hot springs are all energized by Nan Hua. Magma flows from volcanoes just like blood flows through the human body. Once this flow stops death occurs. Fire can be run on gas, crude oil, electricity, coal, firewood. No person can leave fire and still survive. The headlights on the family car and the electricity and gas that cooks rice and heats water is run by fire and supports life. The original spirit of Nan Hua covers the entire world and all sentient beings profit. People have already obtained the generosity of heaven and enjoy these “warm emotions” yet they often display selfishness towards heaven and are not willing to spread some of these affectionate feelings. People want everything in this world yet they are unwilling to shed a single drop of “warm blood”. They only know “profit” and do not understand “expenditure”. They believe that they have it all when actually they have lost everything. These are the most foolish people. People consume the original spirit of Nan Hua but do not know how to save. Thus in these contemporary times an energy crisis looms. If all the firewood is consumed, then one must plant new trees and wait for many years. Thus the saying, “To create is difficult, to destroy is easy.” Therefore, I hope that mortals are more “appreciative” and avoid calamity. One should help others more often and spread warm emotions towards all to naturally obtain affection from others. This is a “period of revival” and one should follow the four points below to enrich oneself:

1. Nan Hua is the growing period of life. If one does not share this spark then their life is arid and tasteless. Nan Hua is like a youth that has matured; full of vigor and enthusiasm. When, with affection, you look after others and warmly care for them your cold and selfish behavior is discarded. These warm emotions are like fire and can illuminate and warm others. Yet you cannot be too quick to handle it because when you play with fire you will get burned.

2. While enveloped by the darkness of night you must carry a lamp to light your path and ask that Nan Hua will illuminate your way. Thus you will avoid falling into a gulley or hitting a telephone pole. “Fire” is your “god” and you cannot depart from it. Yet people often extinguish their lamp and cause harm in the dark by violating the Way or losing virtue. When a bright, red heart loses its color it is called a “black heart” and one in this condition has separated themselves from the spirit of Nan Hua.

3. If one does as one pleases and indulges in desires one’s vigor decreases. Similarly, if crude oil (the *qi* of fire) is consumed excessively it engenders an energy crisis. Although one may be very rich in vigor, if not conserved, by middle-age this person will have a feeble body and be sick often. Thus one should treasure their vitality and ensure that their lamp always has oil and is not extinguished.

4. Mortals should adhere to the principle, “Burn yourself to illuminate others.” The concept of Nan Hua is to burn yourself and cause your own existence to be bright and dispel all black clouds and obstructions. If you illuminate one thousand miles, others will see clearly and you will not be lost. This is like a street lamp. Although you could say that it lights the way for others, it actually lights itself. Therefore, people should sacrifice their “insignificant self” and aid all living beings. You should be like a match that lights the lamp within each person’s heart. This fire will quickly spread and your spark will be a part of each light so that your death is actually a rebirth. The power of fire gives one the power to embark on the task of saving the world. Though people fear being burned they should practice this vitality and only then will they prolong their own life and never be extinguished.

Ji Gong: Our journey to the Nan Hua Palace ends here. I must lead Mr. Yang back to his temple to rest. We will return at a later date to visit Lord Nan Hua but now we must bid you farewell.

Lord Nan Hua: Mr. Yang is fatigued and we will speak again at a later date. I will accompany your return.

Mr. Yang: I am sorry and I ask for Lord Nan Hua’s forgiveness. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher let us return to the temple!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
January 30, 1980

17th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Nan Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Nan Hua

Poem: The way of the world seeps into thoughts and freezes emotions. To cultivate the body is just like smelting cinnabar. Whether people's emotions are cold or warm they should be followed. Buddha and the ancestors should be cherished in the heart and often enjoyed.

Ji Gong: During cold weather everyone lazes about indoors. Snuggled in bed, one feels warm. The world can be both warm and cold. When one has no money, relatives and friends stay far away and infrequently visit. On the other hand, if one suddenly obtains wealth their home will be very busy. Thus it is said, "When it is warm one should spread flowers everywhere, when it is snowing one should give coal to those without." This is because, "On cold days no one walks outside; on warm days shadows abound." Why is the cold and gloomy hell extremely crowded while the warm halls of heaven rarely receive guests? A warm and lively place such as hell actually conceals many who commit evil actions within its bowels while a calm and cold temple is very bright and virtuous. Thus, in the midst of commotion I am often forgotten and people misstep while sinking into the dismal depths of hell unawares. In the cool and calm halls of a temple one's nature is realized and one can walk steadfastly towards light, traveling all the way to the warm halls of heaven. Therefore, whether human emotions are cold or warm they should not obstruct my Way. When one is "cold yet resolute, warm and still hard-working" heaven will allow you to travel freely. Our time to travel to heaven has arrived. Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform and prepare for our journey!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: ...We have already at the Nan Hua Palace. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: While in the human realm the weather feels very cold and causes one to shiver. When I arrive here in the Nan Hua realm I feel very warm. Why is the climate in heaven different than that of the human realm?

Ji Gong: This is the Nan Hua realm where the *qi* of fire flourishes. Therefore you will feel warm.

Mr. Yang: I have heard that the four seasons in heaven are all like spring and there is no hot or cold weather but how is it hot here? Do the immortals and sages who live in this oppressive heat ever have fits of anger because the *qi* of fire is so great?

Ji Gong: If the four seasons in heaven were like spring, the earth would always be hot. How can it be that the immortals and buddhas hide in the grottoes of heaven and do not dare descend to earth! Those who are able to achieve the rank of immortal or buddha must pass through all types of climates (cold and hot) as well as trials. Only then will they be prepared to resist the tests of demons. You feel that the heat here is too strong because you are not yet adapted to this environment. The true sages and sacred buddhas are all accustomed to this heat and what appears hot is not so to them. If a southerner moves to the north they will be unable to bear the cold weather. Yet after they have resided there for a time, they will be as used to the weather as the native people and will not longer think it is “cold” but will be shocked when it is too “hot.” If these immortals and buddhas had not yet built up a tolerance to fire how could they descend to save souls on earth?

Mr. Yang: I have listened to your teachings and I now understand. All things in heaven were established for sentient beings. Buddha said that everything is an illusion yet why is the Western Paradise filled with gold, silver, gems, coral, pearl, agate, and other manner of treasure? The world reveres the Buddhist saying, “Everything is the same; all is void of content.” How is this not a contradiction?

Ji Gong: If Buddhist disciples can grasp these teachings then all Buddhist doctrine will be revealed to them:

1. Since all is said to be emptiness, what reason do people have to revere the Tathagata, Guanyin, Manjusri, and the other bodhisattvas? Therefore, Buddhist disciples often arrogantly regard the descriptions of our travels in this book *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Yet if they slander this description, how can one not laugh at the fact that their Buddhist temples contain images!

2. The jewels and treasures found in paradise are the essence of the universe’s divine spirit. They guide the people of the world and though one’s thoughts can dwell upon them they cannot be eaten or establish relationships. Those that follow this path, although good, are still empty and devoid of content. In order to cause those sentient beings who live in Buddhist realms not to long for the rare treasures of this mortal world, paradise is filled with rivers of innumerable treasure. Those living in these Buddhist realms are used to seeing this and no longer think of it as treasure. All that one longs for in mortal dreams is to be had here. They have no feelings of greed and desire nothing. At the end they return to a realm of peace and quiet and live a carefree existence. All sentient beings regard gold and silver as valuable because it is rare. If gold was as plentiful as the sand and rocks in rivers then people would throw it away like a pair of worn out slippers. The Buddha possesses an immutable strength and can have what he wants. Naturally, no greed arose within him. Everything is the same as nothing and this is the Buddha’s truth. Have sentient beings understood this? Therefore, all the immortals and sages living within this realm of the *qi* of fire exhibit control over themselves and heavenly secrets. They learn without being taught,

cultivate themselves and abstain from getting angry. We will proceed forward and pay our respects to Lord Nan Hua!

Mr. Yang: Merciful teacher you truly understand the secrets of Buddhism. You have dealt a blow to the head of some ignorant Buddhist disciples. These limitless Buddhist teachings are sufficient for generations to come! ...I see Lord Nan Hua approaching us and though his entire body is engulfed in flame he is not burned. The fire is quite hot. Lord Nan Hua, I have arrived again today with my merciful teacher. Please share mysterious truths with all sentient beings.

Lord Nan Hua: Okay! I can see that Mr. Yang sees my body alight with fire and wonders why I am not burned. Ha, ha! This is much like one who, “Does not know Mount Lu’s true color while standing on the mountain.” I am Nan Hua’s Elder of Fire and I spread the *qi* of fire thousands of miles to all worlds. This type of fire is not that which mortals can come into contact. It is like if mortals pick up charcoal that is burning, they will certainly be burned and cry out in pain. Yet the charcoal itself is unfeeling and thus it is said, “Fire does not feel hot as it burns outside its body.” People originally possess a Buddhist mind and Daoist nature yet they are not aware of it. “They are buddhas that have forgotten they are buddhas.” Therefore when, “Wood images are burned the truth appears.” Some people are confused and seek the Way elsewhere. In the end they leave their original family and flow through the cycle of life and death without knowing what path to return on. Therefore when people, “Worship Buddha outside of temples they have already cultivated a golden body within.” If people possessed an original body that emitted the *qi* of fire in all directions they would know no obstructions and would know no harm. Even if this *qi* of fire was bestowed upon people and lost, joy would arise in their heart for to burn oneself is to light the path of others. When mortals’ eyes behold this fire they are injured, when viewed with the eyes of intelligence they are not.

Mr. Yang: Once mortals get a fever why must they get a shot to get rid of it?

Lord Nan Hua: I just said a moment ago that one’s own fire cannot harm your original body which is a truth of the Way. When people’s bodies have risen above thirty-seven degrees centigrade they are said to have a “fever”. They must seek medical attention and encourage the body to reduce its heat which is commonly called “to withdraw the heat”. This will assist one in avoiding damage to the brain and other major organs. From this one may learn that the ability of the human body to resist heat is limited. Take for example a brick which, because it is produced in a kiln, is able to withstand high temperatures. The flame of Nan Hua emanates according to my direction and naturally does no damage to me. Why do you think that this fire does not burn my body? This is because the flame was ignited by me, so how could I be harmed? Those who say that this could injure me are violating the Way. Cultivation is using the strength of your original body to refine yourself. This is how one enters the power of the Way. If one is able to endure a scorching fire of one hundred degrees centigrade without injury then they should add another degree. Continuing to do so

will ensure that your body's ability to withstand heat progresses. Thus it is said that those cultivated can, "Enter a fire and not be burned, enter water and not drown." Is that not this technique? People cannot ascend from this mortal realm without being restrained by the *qi* above. These then are "ordinary people." In cold weather, some people cover their entire body with warm clothes yet still feel cold. Some wear light clothes and do not feel the cold. It is the same of people's bodies. The body is able to become strong or weak. Therefore, how can people break through the illusory nature of the world and the confusions of mortal life? That is the skill of those cultivated. Today you have come to the Nan Hua Palace and I will share my teachings with mortals so that they can break free from confusion and adapt to this Nan Hua environment of the *qi* of fire. This is how one on the path to cultivation should refine their body!

Mr. Yang: Lord Nan Hua's words are as gold and have freed my mind from its obstructions!

Lord Nan Hua: I have not freed your mind but instead have used fire to burn this mental obstruction blocking the way to your understanding. Where would you like to go today?

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! Please Lord Nan Hua, show mercy. Be careful when burning this mental obstruction because Mr. Yang is just renting and he will have nowhere to reside.

Lord Nan Hua: If I was not a little cruel he would still be resting on his warm bed! I delicately used fire to burn him so he no longer needs to be covered by a quilt. Is my use of fire not cleaner and warmer?

Ji Gong: This is certainly not the case. Your fire has given him warmth, yet he cannot bear it for long and will soon be injured. Mr. Yang, what do you think about what Lord Nan Hua has said?

Mr. Yang: I know that Lord Nan Hua is testing my intelligence and is seeing just how much I understand. I am willing to articulate what I have been taught in front of you both and allow you to judge for yourselves.

1. Lord Nan Hua would like to use fire to dispel my "mental obstructions" and would like me to discover myself. People often dwell within these mental blocks where the mind feels safe and secure. Yet to live in this way fosters a dependant nature and an unaware mind. If a thief enters a residence to steal possessions and the items that they seek are not within a chest or cabinets then the location of this hidden gold and silver is outside the scope of this thief. When protecting one's life one naturally does not ask to progress. Lord Nan Hua would like to burn my mental obstructions and cause me to dwell in a place without these material comforts. Suddenly enlightened one can ask oneself, "Where would I now like to reside?" and while one usually recognizes a

house as a dwelling in this moment one can discover one's true self. Without the cover of material comforts one is no longer concealed and people's words and actions will become very cautious, afraid that every shameful action will be seen. At this moment only "life's true form"⁵¹¹ will appear and will be far from all artificial forms.

2. Lord Nan Hua's use of fire to clear my mental obstruction is just like the Buddha's saying, "When the three realms are not at peace it is as if one's residence is ablaze." That is the kind of fire that cannot be fought by any person. When a person's home is ablaze for the first time they "flee for their life" and only in this moment will they realize that, "The affairs of this world are fleeting, life and death is all that matters" and thus let go of everything. This reveals that those cultivated should not rely on external influences but must seek the road of life through their own strength. Otherwise, once the external environment changes in what area can I "enjoy peace and stability"? What does Lord Nan Hua think about what I have said?

Lord Nan Hua: Yes! A mental obstruction does not need to stay indefinitely. Heaven covers earth like a large house. Above sweet dew and rain spread and below all manner of substances and grains are grown. Do not fear raging fires and floods, this is a golden mansion! That which Mr. Yang has shared is similar to what is in my mind and he has revealed heavenly secrets. Sentient beings will surely be enlightened and will naturally obtain the Way. If sentient beings want their nature and spirits to unite with mine and the *qi* of fire to cover entire body they must read these words aloud:

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

Mr. Yang: Lord Nan Hua's verses of the spirit contain profound mysteries and divine strength. Those mortals willing to devoutly read them aloud will certainly be touched. My mental obstruction has already been burned by Nan Hua's *qi* of fire. On one side I see a sea of fire that is now glittering like gold. It has burned all the dried up parts of my body and a golden-bodied buddha appears from the piles of ash within me!

Lord Nan Hua: Yes! Mr. Yang's original spirit has not been destroyed and you have obtained enlightenment in the Way of Nan Hua and created some extraordinary fruits of the Way. Since ancient times, the noble knowledge of bright teachers was spread by many methods. Some pupils were beat with a club, directed with the hand, abused through shouting, plucked as a flower,⁵¹² smiled at, washed in water, enlightened through fragrance, or stuck with a needle. Yet my spirit is transmitted through the burning of fire. Because people in contemporary times pay great attention to artificial appearances they do not cultivate their inner hearts. If one is glamorously dressed it does not mean that they are a good person; extravagant skyscrapers often house petty people. Therefore, I use fire to burn false appearances and dwellings and cause evil and petty people to see original form. This is how I enlighten them!⁵¹³

⁵¹¹ True form can also be translated as the realm of phenomenon or Dharmadhatu.

⁵¹² This refers to a method of gaining a thorough understanding of esoteric Buddhist teachings.

⁵¹³ This sentence is a pun as it could also mean to "light them on fire".

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! Those sentient beings who are hit but not awake, directed but lacking, or washed yet not clean will be alert at this time! If they do not heed Lord Nan Hua's warning, their true colors will be revealed shortly!

Mr. Yang: The merit of Nan Hua is robust and vast. What responsibilities does Lord Nan Hua currently bear; to save all sentient beings?

Lord Nan Hua: The Five Elders preside together over the matter of the salvation of the three realms and the Golden Mother's reception of all original spirits. The mysteries of heaven are difficult for mortals to comprehend but today fate is ripe and I will divulge one or two secrets which will supply all sentient beings with the means to pursue cultivation. These secrets will also save original spirits and, through the help of Guan Yu,⁵¹⁴ fulfill the Golden Mother's edict and assist Guanyin's work of salvation. Lord Guan's original spirit divided from me, Elder Fire, and thus he is also called, "The Vermillion-Robed God inside the Zi Wei Palace." Guan Yu was born with a red face and a mind and nature like fire. His true *qi* caused people to shiver and he covered all with his righteousness. Guan Yu acted in accordance with the five constants: benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, and belief. He displayed these characteristics so that sentient beings could become cultivated. It did not matter to Guan Yu if one was at home or abroad, if these principles were disobeyed the offender received judgment and ceased their evil ways. As the Way descended to earth, phoenix halls clarified these teachings and Lord Guan presides over the affairs of salvation. He represents me, Lord Nan Hua, in guiding back original spirits and completes the assignment of the Five Elders. Therefore, because of heaven's fortune, phoenix halls are flourishing today. Lord Guan maintains the south's *qi* of fire. Born on a hot day in June his nature is brave and ferocious. After he was beheaded and ascended to heaven he was stationed at the fire of Southern Heaven and because he saved many sentient beings his merit is extremely vast. While on earth his spirit was not concealed and thus he is revered and called "Mysterious Spirit and High Lord". It is also said, "His salvation of original spirits was benevolent and righteous like the Buddha of old." The gloomy *qi* of the world spread and without Lord Guan's *qi* of fire and purity – which extended from me – I am afraid that all immortals and Buddhas would have lacked strength. Teachings would also have been muddled as one relies on Lord Guan's true *qi* to clarify spirit-written teachings and preserve an un-extinguishable Way. Therefore, I hope that all sentient beings cultivate themselves in the Way and study the teachings of the Buddha. These beings should also devoutly revere Lord Guan and break through all evil barriers to protect, achieve, and remember the Way.

Ji Gong: The true *qi* and righteousness of Lord Guan is vast. Guan Yu is a teacher of heavenly beings and is truly a model for those pursuing the Way in contemporary times. If one departs from the two words "true *qi*," regardless of which religious tradition, it is an "evil Way." Therefore, it does not matter what specific religious sect sentient beings belong to, they must maintain this true *qi* within their hearts. One

⁵¹⁴ This figure is also called Guan Gong, Guan Yu, and Guan Di.

cannot think that Lord Guan is just a lesser god or a protector of Buddhist dharma. Actually, Lord Guan is an ancient buddha and golden immortal. While in action he appears as “Lord Guan” and while at peace he appears as the “Tathagata”. Although there are two images his heart remains the same. Do sentient beings understand this?

Lord Nan Hua: What Ji Gong has said is correct! Some people have said that they will not worship a god with so a long a beard. They do not know that the Tathagata is still alive within the Western Paradise and his beard stretches from the Western Paradise to the earth in the east. Actually, those fated can “grasp this beard and ascend this merciful path” and do not need to walk in the “footsteps of Buddha”. The two are similar as both the “Beard of Buddha” and “Footstep of Buddha” lead to higher positions, yet only those on the path to cultivation who pull the “Beard of Buddha” are able to practice more self-control and float to a carefree existence. Therefore, when the prejudiced heart arises those people who reject the “Beard of Buddha” will struggle to grasp the Buddha’s “footsteps or beard” and if both are unattainable that is a dangerous situation. When the arrogant, prejudiced, or slanderous heart arises one has departed from the Buddha and when this occurs one will certainly fall upon a cruel death! People concerned with minor details have a vision that is very short-sighted and prejudiced! They are truly concerned with minor details! I desire for all living beings to hear my teachings and to be suddenly enlightened. I also hope that they will cultivate themselves and study Buddhism while pursuing the ultimate nirvana and Dharmadhatu. When one attains a Buddha nature they will not separate themselves from Mount Ling!

Mr. Yang: Ji Gong and Lord Nan Hua’s teachings follow the Middle Way without prejudice or personal views. According to the world’s religious masters, heaven is separated from earth by an abyss. The living buddhas and immortal lords stand in heaven and teach that all people should be seen as one which demonstrates that, “Buddhist doctrine is limitless; the gods are connected to all.” Yet those religious masters of great merit in the mortal world stand on earth teaching that one should only look at that which is in front of you. Thus their teachings are naturally “skewed and limited”! These views will only create religious struggles based on accusation, discrimination, and slander which causes people great harm!

Ji Gong: The concern for bodhisattvas is the stubbornness of human nature which is difficult to change. As the way of the world becomes more prevalent I hope that people do not seek out this “menial way” but turn to the “great Way” and ensure that their travels lead them to the sacred cities of heaven. Thus one will not become a “selfish ghost” but a buddha!

Lord Nan Hua: In order to confirm these teachings I will guide Mr. Yang to view the hidden truths of this Nan Hua realm. Please follow me!

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Nan Hua for your mercy in clarifying the infinite miracles of the Way. Your teachings are an enormous benefit to all sentient beings! ...Ahead

are some pavilions that have been painted completely red. Each one is as bright as daylight and a red light emits from within. What does this mean?

Lord Nan Hua: There are sages and worthies sitting in meditation within those structures who are practicing the *qi* of Nan Hua. Thus that type of red light is emitted. Mr. Yang, can you see the earth's night sky to your left? Isn't it marvelous?

Mr. Yang: Lord Nan Hua passes his hand in front of my eyes and suddenly to my left I can see the earth's night sky. I can see the lights of countless cities, streets, and homes glittering below. This scene is too beautiful.

Lord Nan Hua: This view of the world contains infinite secrets. The fire of Nan Hua burns within the night sky and although people are both good and evil it does not matter if a household is upright or immoral as all need the accompaniment of the light that I produce. I do not record people's merits or demerits. My only desire is to guide them to travel to the light above. This is the light of life! Those in the dark are in particular need of light. Can mortals achieve a heart full of light? We will turn back to view the cultivated sages of this Nan Hua realm which are emitting vast amounts of *qi*. Every sage and worthy unceasingly produces this burning light within their heart. After a period of time their entire body is filled with this true *qi* and they connect with the original and rotating ball of essence. These beings then have infinite powers and travel to various spiritual worlds to complete their path in the Way! Mr. Yang, you can ask them about their path to cultivation and serve as the mirror that will reflect this knowledge to sentient beings on earth!

Mr. Yang: Okay! I can feel the warm flow of energy from the sages and worthies that are completely concentrating on their own self-cultivation. Their entire body emits light and their *qi* is extraordinary. They are like pure "luminous beings" and I have much admiration for them. Sage, are you a Buddhist monk? You are wearing robes, your head is shaved, and you appear very devout. How did you attain cultivation in this realm?

Great Master:⁵¹⁵ Mr. Yang, it is good that you have come! This is certainly fate and will bring great fortune to sentient beings on earth. Others do not see true teachings and mysteries, yet you have golden eyes which discern these treasures and obtain this original knowledge. I would first like to congratulate you! *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is like the Sutra of the Diamond Cutter⁵¹⁶ or the Heart Sutra.⁵¹⁷ You could say that it is part of the true Buddhist canon and has arisen from Buddhist teachings to cross into a new realm. It could be called a "true canon" of these latter times and I hope that my fellow Buddhist disciples discard the Buddhist path that I followed, quickly become enlightened, enter the phoenix hall, and attain the correct Way. When I was fifteen years old I became a Buddhist monk and my dharma name

⁵¹⁵ In the online version from "Webhope" this character is called Sacred Buddha (聖佛).

⁵¹⁶ This is the *Vajracchedika Sutra*, 金剛經, or 金剛般若波羅蜜經.

⁵¹⁷ This is the *Prajna Paramita* or 心經.

was “Chan Yi.” I began to study Buddhism and pursue cultivation. I would arise at 5:00am and clean the inside and outside of the temple. After cleaning the dirt from around the temple I would read scriptures and wash away the filth from within my heart. I was also instructed by my teacher to sit in Chan meditation. The years passed as flowing water and I was thirty years old in an instant. I studied the tripitaka intensely and sincerely and my understanding of Buddhist doctrine was deep. One day while meditating, I suddenly saw three fruit trees (tangerine, star fruit, and mango) each covered completely with fruit. The fruit was ripe and was emitting rays of light. Suddenly the fruit fell to the ground which was just like the saying, “When a melon is ripe it falls of its own accord.”⁵¹⁸ At that time, the branches and leaves of these three fruit trees shook and the trees said together, “We are untroubled and have no obstructions that weigh us down.” After a moment, all the leaves fell to the ground and I heard all three fruit trees joyfully shout together, “Now we have no leaves (work) and our bodies are peaceful! We no longer need to bear our burdens day and night!” After I awoke from meditation I was immediately enlightened! From this time on, I worked very hard towards enlightenment and cultivation and received illumination from the scriptures. I also comprehended things more quickly and deeply. These tangerine, star fruit, and mango trees can serve as an allegory for the three religions.⁵¹⁹ Each is growing in the same location and although their branches and leaves are different their common desire is to blossom and produce fruit which provides sentient beings with something to eat. This type of assistance to people’s spirits is the work of all saints and worthies and therefore we should respect them all equally. As the melon was ripe and fell of its own accord so too the leaves fell and returned to their origins. The implication of this is that those people pursuing cultivation cannot stubbornly hold onto things, cannot be covetous, and should relinquish all material things while following their natural course without worry or obstruction. When one’s soul is confused it causes one’s heart and disposition to be unable to be open and bright. This is like long-term suffering in which one cannot put down a weighty burden and though with heavy footsteps wants to ascend to a distant paradise yet time is wasted and progress is slow. Therefore, when one produces *qi* and sheds this heavy burden you will feel very pleased and relaxed and your next step will take you all the way to paradise. Within life, I grasped the principle that all sentient beings should treat practioners of each religion with equal respect and encourage them in their own belief or religion to seek vitality and truth. Thus, each person will follow their own path to a joyful Way and cultivated body and will attain their own achievements. This is much like a merciful father or holy teacher who is regarded with respect only after they do not belittle others. These are the truths that I have realized from Buddhist teachings. We all have different fates to follow which is the reason that I had the opportunity to talk to you today. Because I have undergone all types of trials and have not toppled I was able to climb to the heaven of the Five Elders and practice profound Buddhist teachings. Buddhist doctrine is spread like the light of a lamp. This lamp relies on the light of fire and I am now smelting myself in this golden fire to become an iron-clad tool. The average body lives to seventy years old and is

⁵¹⁸ In colloquial parlance this saying means, “Things take care of themselves when the time comes.”

⁵¹⁹ Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

extinguished when the spirit flies up towards heaven. I am grateful for all that was given to me by sentient beings and they are truly the strength that provided for the fruits of my successful cultivation. Without them how could I be here? To value all sentient beings equally is to raise yourself up! I hope that Buddhist practitioners all offer their “Tathagata heart” to others!

Ji Gong: Great Master Chan Yi, you have truly illuminated Buddhist teachings and today you have achieved success! Congratulations.

Great Master: You are too polite! Ji Gong’s own actions are extraordinary as you bear the weighty responsibility of saving all sentient beings. You must be exhausted!

Lord Dong Hua: Mr. Yang, ask another sage about their process of cultivation!

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Dong Hua for this reminder! This sage looks compassionate and light emits from his extraordinary golden body! Excuse me, how did you attain this level of cultivation?

Golden Immortal: I have no notable past in the Way. I merely performed good deeds and donated to the needy without asking for anything in return. I never would have imagined while on earth that performing those good deeds would cause my spirit to enter this miraculous realm. While on earth, I sold various goods to sustain my livelihood. I set fair prices and treated others as if they were my own family. I dealt honestly with both young and old and thus my business slowly grew and I became wealthy. Because I enjoyed spending time among the immortals and buddhas I often visited temples and gladly gave donations to assist in their upkeep and reconstruction. When I came across the destitute I felt pity and helped them to overcome their difficulties. I also distributed Buddhist scriptures and morality books and paid to have them printed. The strength of good deeds is great. One should cultivate the body, practice self-control, and not commit even the smallest of offenses while carefully guarding their ethics and morality. Give without expecting anything in return and act joyfully. I believed that heaven had given me my wealth and was using me to distribute it to others. Heaven would certainly not want me to spend it all on my own selfish uses and therefore I considered this wealth as if it were manure and I marshaled all my effort to give to those who needed it. Within life one cannot present two faces. Even when insulted, my heart harbored no resentment! I lived in the mortal world for eighty-two years before my spirit floated up to heaven. I encountered all types of tests and today I am at the Nan Hua Palace preparing myself to become closer to my original state! I would like to share the message with sentient beings that those on the path to cultivation should not seek after fame or rank. Whether you have achieved much or little cultivation you will know in your heart. Why must people act as a violent storm and draw attention to themselves while spoiling their fruits of the Way?

Mr. Yang: The position attained by not seeking fame and giving to the needy will lead one to a position higher than the “atmosphere.” You have attained this heavenly

realm which confirms that your flower has bloomed and you have obtained fruit of the Way. Just because people have no luck with success does not mean that they will not have luck in attaining the Way.

Ji Gong: Our stay has been lengthy. We have gratefully heard this sage's teachings which have been of great help to all sentient beings. Thank you for Lord Nan Hua's assistance in ensuring that *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* will be a glorious book.

Lord Nan Hua: You are too kind! The great Way of Nan Hua is only a small part of this "spiritual light and glory." I hope that all mortals protect the light that is within their hearts. If they do so they will certainly shine brightly together and return to this Nan Hua realm! Nan Hua has been revealed to those below and I hope that mortals will heed these true teachings!

Mr. Yang: Thank you for Lord Nan Hua's enlightening assistance in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Your bright spirit has been added lighting the path for all sentient beings in darkness. Those willing to read this book with a grateful heart will receive teachings from the sages above! We bid farewell to Lord Nan Hua!

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform and prepare to return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting. Let us return!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
March 25, 1980

18th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Xi Hua Palace... Teachings of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond

Poem: *The crowd of people bubbles as an overflowing sulfur spring. They do not know to return and cultivate fields of good fortune. To pursue immortals externally is like covering shadows with air.*⁵²⁰ *The living buddha should be worshipped sincerely within the home.*

Ji Gong: People are often unsatisfied with their present condition yet they do not attempt to change their own thoughts or actions. They constantly blame others which only makes their situation worse and never leads to something better. Those pursuing cultivation all want to ascend to the paradise that they have imagined, yet they often do not know how best to cultivate their own spiritual tree and instead pursue external achievements. To turn your attention to external matters while pursuing buddhahood is like trying to catch a pigeon outside. When your hand reaches out the bird flies away and the closer you get the higher it flies. To turn your attention inward is like stretching out your hand towards a cage and catching the bird. Belief is as easy as turning over the palm of one's hand. Therefore, I hope that people will examine themselves more often and cultivate the garden of their heart. Once one has harvested their crop do they not eat heartily? One can even sell any surplus fruit and become wealthy! Thus, sentient beings should not look lightly at themselves because if one always runs away from what is inside they will soon weary and then what can they accomplish? Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to the heavenly realm. Climb aboard the lotus flower platform!

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting firmly. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: I will guide my worthy disciple to view the sacred scenery of heaven. My intention is to make all sentient beings feel as if they are traveling with us on these journeys. Open your heart, worthy disciple, and together we will sing a song of exhortation to the world!

Mr. Yang: This disciple has little talent and even less learning. I cannot compose poetry and my singing voice is feeble. I am afraid that I cannot keep up with you and I will be a disgrace!

Ji Gong: That is all right. As long as you do not get too confused you will be fine. Plus, we are not trying to find the next musical star so why are you so worried? I will boost your spirits and ensure that your mind is agile. Join me!

Mr. Yang: Okay, I will follow you!

⁵²⁰ This is from the saying, "To make a claim that cannot be substantiated."

Ji Gong: With ordinary emotions and crude circumstances one is truly irresolute!⁵²¹

Mr. Yang: Learning from my teacher we travel to the west!

Ji Gong: With a refreshing breeze and two sleeves the spirit is bright!

Mr. Yang: One black cloud and the moon appears cold!

Ji Gong: Like a dream people's lives are not very long!

Mr. Yang: Early cultivation in the great Way avoids inconsistency!

Ji Gong: For the butcher to lay down his knife is not absurd!

Mr. Yang: To nurture one's nature and cultivate the body ensures good health!

Ji Gong: Buddhas and immortals row the vessel of mercy!

Mr. Yang: Good wisdom and the dharma manifests as thunder!

Ji Gong: You sang very well! Though the verses that we composed were simple their meaning is quite profound. When mortals here this they will be enlightened! Quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: This location looks different than others that we have traveled to in the past. There is a gold light everywhere as if mountains of wealth are smiling down upon us. There are also golden birds soaring above. It is spectacular. Where are we?

Ji Gong: This is the great Way's location of salvation for sentient beings. There is gold everywhere and golden birds in the sky. The ground is covered with golden trees and golden flowers. Goldfish swim freely in jade ponds.⁵²² Wonderful and rare gems appear everywhere and this location collects much *qi*. This is where the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond resides. The Golden Mother is the mother of all sentient beings' original spirits and she is also called Lord Xi Hua. She is noble and merciful without bounds. Let us prepare ourselves and quickly enter to pay our respects!

Mr. Yang: Yes! I am fortunate to have the opportunity to visit the Golden Mother today. Ahead of me I can see a lofty palace that sparkles with golden light. Written above the door the words "Palace of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond" catch my

⁵²¹ These stanzas all written in rhyming, heptasyllabic verse.

⁵²² One of the first recorded descriptions of the pools of heaven is in the poem "Far-Off Journey" (遠遊) in *Songs of the South*.

eye. In front of the palace immortal women are dressed alike in rainbow-colored clothes. They are elegant and beautiful as they nod to us and smile!

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, quickly enter the palace and pay your respects to the Golden Mother!

Mr. Yang: Yes! Within the palace sits a kind looking mother attended by immortal women on her right and left. I humbly bow before the Golden Mother! I have received heaven's edict to author this book and I have followed my teacher through the three realms to search for the Way and to seek truth. Today, I am honored to be here at the Golden Mother's sacred residence and crying tears of joy I respectfully greet you! Sentient beings are foolish and lost. Thus they are not yet able to return to their original source which causes the Golden Mother to wait anxiously at her gate shedding tears of mercy while awaiting their return. I have accepted the sacred responsibility of saving sentient beings. This task has not yet been completed and I feel worried. I ask that the Golden Mother replenish my intelligence and spirit and facilitate the salvation of mortal beings. I previously followed heaven's edict and completed *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* with my teacher. Now I have been directed to complete *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. I carry this sacred edict, which I do not dare neglect, yet my trials are many. My mind is broken by desire and I pray that the Golden Mother can mercifully emancipate me from the filth and entanglements of the vulgar world and help me to find the great Way.

Golden Mother: Yes! My original son, Mr. Yang! The cyan phoenix is suspended by a thread and spitting out golden words it divulges the dark secrets of the great Way and explains all mysteries of the scriptures. Bearing this sacred burden, your will in the Way is extraordinary and your accomplishments are victorious. In providing salvation for those in the three realms, heaven and hell have been equally busy. *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* is already available to the people of this world and provides the secrets to life. *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is the second part to this sacred canon and takes place in this vast heavenly realm. Of the three realms the human realm is the most treasured, therefore humanity receives the most mercy. Since ancient times, when one follows the Way demons arise. I hope that Mr. Yang overcomes his adverse circumstances and completes *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. This great achievement will be remembered forever and not only will your ancestors ascend to paradise but all sentient beings and original spirits will, by means of this book, seek and cultivate themselves in the true Way. Up to now you have completed one part of your sacred task. Mother and child share the same heart and I am aware of your difficulties. When I bestow upon you spiritual light and strength in the Way I hope that your vitality will be boosted and glory will shine from your sacred pen to light the world. This will cause more sentient beings to awake from illusion and more quickly escape the filth of the world. They will be cleansed and march hand in hand to enter the virtuous Way. Thus, mortals will be guided by the direction of heaven forever. Wouldn't that be wonderful!

Mr. Yang: Thank you, Golden Mother, for adding spiritual light to my spirit. Your golden words ring forth with strength and pour into my heart. I suddenly feel that my vision is clear and *qi* is full. I hope that the loving Mother's compassion and care is constantly bestowed upon me! I will certainly complete my assignment so do not worry!

Golden Mother: As the poem says, "The thread in the hand of a kind mother is the coat on the wanderer's back. Before he left she stitched it close in secret fear that he would be slow to return. Who will say that the inch of grass in his heart is gratitude enough for all the sunshine of spring?"⁵²³ All of my children have now become wanderers. The immortal clothes that they once wore have already disappeared and have now been exchanged for common clothes. As they departed the mountain on which they were created their loving mother stitched clothes and bitterly bid them farewell. I was worried that after they descended to the mortal world that they would forget about the pure heavenly realm and perish after slowly forgetting how to return to heaven. Yet I hope that they will all be able to grasp onto the golden thread which your Mother dangles from heaven and climb aboard the vessel of mercy to return to my presence. Thus you can repay your Mother's kindness. Otherwise, you will become unfilial children. Do you understand?

Ji Gong: Golden Mother's words have moved me to tears. Can mortals hear these words and be unmoved?

Mr. Yang: There are currently many people who worship at the Golden Mother's temples. It would certainly be a good thing if people were able to return to their origin and become acquainted with their mother. Belief is a premonition shared by all of humanity. I hope that the Golden Mother will continue her compassion and share some methods for cultivation in the Way which I would humbly like to listen to.

Golden Mother: I live in the West and I am also called "Lord Xi Hua." Some people have said, "In modern times the world is run on gold!" and in the West people can especially be said to "worship gold." In contemporary times, the value of gold is rising quickly which demonstrates that the Golden Mother's time of salvation has come. Thus, my nickname is present throughout the world. The fortunes of heaven circulate to the West and thus the great Way has descended to earth. Those fated for salvation should recognize that they all have the same mother, God, and only then will the world be as one. I hope that the mysteries of heaven are realized by all sentient beings.

Mr. Yang: Merciful Mother, I implore you to share these secrets.

Golden Mother: Gold is the king of all treasures thus mortals view gold as the "most precious treasure." Thus gold indicates my lofty status. Why am I called "mother"? Gold is a precious object which can be smelt in fire, soaked in water, buried in earth, and crushed by wood. Thus it is the king of the five elements and the spirit of the Five

⁵²³ This poem is Meng Jiao's "Song of the Wanderer" and the translation is by A.C. Graham.

Elders which can never be extinguished. Therefore, the body of the Buddha is called a “golden body” and the Daoist body is labeled “golden cinnabar.” Gold is honored, circulates far and wide, and is sought after by immortals and mortals. The “Golden Mother” is able to produce “golden children” and the “Buddhist Mother” is able to produce “Buddhist children” and is the master of all spirits. Thus I am called mother. The spirit of all things contains a golden light. Therefore, original spirits were born of a Golden Mother. This reveals that spirits are as gold and cannot be extinguished. I hope that mortals realize this.

Mr. Yang: The merit that Golden Mother attained from creating all original spirits is limitless. Can the Golden Mother please reveal where she came from and how mortals can cultivate themselves according to your great merit and enter your embrace?

Golden Mother: All *qi* was located in the rotating ball of essence from which split the Heavenly and Mysterious Woman. Therefore, my spirit was originally part of this rotating ball. The Three Clarities emerged next followed by the Five Elders who created all of mankind. I then became the head of the Five Elders, “gold.” As Golden Mother, I was responsible for creating all original spirits. This was a weighty task which Yuan Shi Tian Zun has explained to you in great detail so I will not discuss it further. I am bringing salvation to all sentient beings and the world below has already entered a “golden age.” The five metals surround people on earth today like steel rods, iron buildings, iron beds, trains, automobiles, airplanes, telephones, televisions, glasses, watches, necklaces, rings, etc. The machines that produce food and clothing are no longer made of earth or wood but of metal. This demonstrates that “gold” is a treasure around people today as a “mother” is the treasure of all living beings. The *qi* of gold is something that all people delight in, yet it diverts some people’s natures to focus on material things and their lives become wasted. This is called, “To be intoxicated by money and confused by gold.”⁵²⁴ Yet in order to save all original spirits I will blanket sentient beings with this gold *qi*.

1. The West is represented by “gold” and within the five heavenly virtues it is “benefit.” Of the five colors it is “white,” of the four seasons it is “fall,” within the human realm my reincarnation was as the Xia Dynasty’s “Emperor Yu,”⁵²⁵ and of the five human virtues it is “righteousness.” In the human body it controls the “lungs” and “skin” and of the five evils it wards off “thieves.”

2. Descending from above this “gold *qi*” dispels reason.

Teachings omitted due to redundancy.

I will guide you to view the Xi Hua realm!

⁵²⁴ This saying means, “Indulge in a wanton life”.

⁵²⁵ Emperor Yu was the first ruler and founder of the Xia Dynasty.

Mr. Yang: The Golden Mother is most merciful. I share my infinite gratitude for the tireless way that you speak to all sentient beings. I see the pure and smiling faces of the immortal women here and I have a relaxed and forgetful feeling! What does this mean?

Golden Mother: These immortal attendants are women who have ascended above the filth of the world and they are different than common or mortal women. Their pure and lofty *qi* attracts you but certainly they have not affected your heart?

Mr. Yang: Certainly not! May I ask them about their path to cultivation?

Golden Mother: Of course you can!

Mr. Yang: Immortal woman, may I ask you about your path to cultivation and what methods you use to protect the pure *qi* that you possess? Because both males and females in contemporary times would like to preserve their youthfulness if you are able to divulge this secret I believe that mortals would be endlessly grateful!

Immortal Woman: I remember that my path to cultivation was rocky and full of difficulties. Yet perhaps because of these difficulties I was able to overcome the human realm and attain something extraordinary. I lost my parents when I was young and I was raised by my uncle. Even when I was young, whenever I saw a temple I was very respectful and I wanted to pursue matters of cultivation. After some time I took Master Hui Zhen Shang as my teacher and studied the Way with all of my heart. I have undergone every type of trial, yet my will in the Way never faltered. At last, I finally attained the great Way and convinced the Golden Mother to take me as her attendant. Why do the immortal women appear so beautiful and never age? This is because our hearts have no desires or worries and we are completely pure. We have forgotten time and we no longer grow old! “No worries” and “no aging” means one can “forget the years” and “forget getting older.” Maintain a chaste and clean nature and the face will appear fresh and glow. If one’s heart is unsteady, no expensive face wash or exclusive massage will be able to maintain one’s youth. The secret to one’s countenance is in these words, “Have less worries and more simple food; look at your appearance less and observe your heart more often.” If men and women on earth can put this secret into effect then they will no longer use cosmetics and will forever have a natural beauty. Will they not be happier?

Ji Gong: Because our time is short we will come back to see more at another time. We bid farewell to the Golden Mother and all the immortal women!

Mr. Yang: I am infinitely grateful for the Golden Mother’s compassion! Because our time is up I must follow my teacher and return to my temple. I bid farewell to the Golden Mother.

Golden Mother: So it is thus. I do not want to keep you. Please return at a later date!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
April 8, 1980

19th Journey: Return to and Listen at the Xi Hua Palace... Teachings of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond

Poem: An otherworldly paradise has scenery secluded. The traveler like flame rides the clouded vessel. Coiled beneath the peach tree circulates the smell of incense. Light, sweet dew moistens the throat of jade.

Ji Gong: Today we will both travel again among the clouds to the Jade Pond. We will pay our respects to the Golden Mother and listen to her teachings. Worthy disciple, prepare yourself to follow me!

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. The fortune of the three realms has allowed me to travel to the Jade Pond and listen to the Golden Mother's teachings. I will not forget heaven's kindness and my teacher's goodness!

Ji Gong: I easily steer this lotus flower platform towards the realm of the Jade Pond. ... We have already arrived at the Golden Mother's sacred residence, the Xi Hua Palace and Jade Pond! Mr. Yang, quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform, and we will pay our respects to the Golden Mother!

Mr. Yang: Yes! The scenery here at the Jade Pond is pleasant. An immortal wind blows in all directions while golden rays twinkle. This allows one's heart to feel extremely relaxed! The light there is different than other locations. Not only does it not irritate the eyes it causes them to open wide and it is difficult to close them. Why is this?

Ji Gong: This Xi Hua realm and the Jade Pond are the residences of the Golden Mother. This location gathers a gold *qi* much like Mount Jin on earth. On earth "people's eyes open when they see money." Therefore, when you see this type of golden light you naturally feel that you cannot close your eyes. This is called, "eyes bright with envy"! Ha, ha! Do not be greedy. We will go visit the Golden Mother!

Mr. Yang: Upon entering the sacred palace I see that the Golden Mother is already smiling. The immortal women also nod to us and smile in greeting. I feel extremely happy. ... I bow respectfully before the Golden Mother. Today, I have come with my teacher to the Jade Pond and I earnestly beseech the Golden Mother to compassionately bestow her golden light upon us and explain the mysteries of the great Way for all mortals.

Golden Mother: Yes! My son Yang rides the vessel of mercy with Ji Gong through the three realms in an attempt to bring salvation to sentient beings. You represent me in my concern for these beings and you are a filial son about whom this mother feels

pleased. The earlier one's fate is planted, the deeper one's roots in the Way can grow. This is why you are able to perform these great deeds today. I hope that you will both promise to work hard and quickly finish *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Saving sentient beings is a sacred work and when completed it will bring you great merit. To assist the immortals and buddhas of heaven who sigh and say that people are difficult to save this book will find those original (fated)⁵²⁶ sentient beings to return to heaven and reunite with their mother... I will again guide my son Yang to view the realm of the Jade Pond and show him the great Way.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Golden Mother's words. ...Following behind the Golden Mother I am accompanied by a group of immortal women. It feels as if I am returning to my natal home and the immortal women are my sisters. It is as if we have met somewhere before and the scene before me also appears familiar...

Golden Mother: What you have said is correct. You are remembering the beginning, when heaven met earth, and you were created on the "Slope of the Three Mountains" where you were all brothers and sisters. Immediately after you were dunked in the Sea of Bitterness the clothes of your immortal family were discarded. Once bathed, you ceased to be awake as you were already a part of the mortal world. The bodies of those original beings were without anything and therefore they used the leaves of trees to conceal their nakedness. Today this pure leaf has transformed into clothes made from cloth. Similarly, one's original Buddha nature and immortal spirit has been gradually forgotten and the appearance of each person has changed. While mortals cling to family and friends, in the greedy and bustling world they often take what is false for what is true and ignorantly pass their days. These immortal women were your sisters from before. When they descended to the human realm they underwent bitter suffering and it is now as if they have awakened from a dream, are cultivated in the true fruits, reborn, and have returned to my side.

Mr. Yang: What the Golden Mother has said is correct. All sentient beings were born of the same roots. Here is a pond overflowing with white lotus flowers. They are a pure white and beautifully formed. Within the pond there are also goldfish which swim this way and that. They appear so carefree. Oh, I am envious!

Golden Mother: This is one section of the wonderful Jade Pond. The Jade Pond is also called the "Western Pond." The lotus flowers are in full bloom and the goldfish swim about freely which serves as an illustration of those that have attained cultivation. Lotus flowers and goldfish are both living organisms that have spirits. I will approach them and ask them to talk. Lotus flower, lotus flower! Your pure white brilliance is like an immortal raft floating on the Sea of Bitterness. Aloof from selfish affairs your petals are not soiled in the least. Your refined *qi* surpasses that of humans, open your mouth and speak!

⁵²⁶ Both original are fated are pronounced *yuan*.

Mr. Yang: After the Golden Mother spoke these merciful words the lotus flowers within the pond began to move as if in reply to the Jade Pond's master. From within one of the flowers there emitted a clear and gentle voice which said: "I live within a filthy and muddy environment and although the pond is filled with dirty water I am able to maintain a simple and honest heart. I endure hardships with determination, steadfastly move forward, and do not retreat just because my environment is evil or inferior. Wading through the sludge tests my roots in the Way and I lead a tranquil life without worldly desires. I lightly float upon the water yet I feel very satisfied. Although my roots descend to unclean places, my leaves and the flower of my heart faces the light. People! You live in a very impure world and tread upon a superficial and unclean path. Will the conscience of your original spirit also become filthy? There are not many mortals that are free to move about and remain unburied in the muck of the world. How many people can maintain an honest or pure heart? My roots sink into the mud and purify even the smallest bacterium which is transformed into that which gives me life. Can you believe that although I come from the dirt I am not soiled? Humanity is in decline and perishing with no way to extract itself. People who are immersed in muddy water do not last long before they begin to decay. I can see that your skill in the Way is meager and you do not have the strength to resist. You cannot stand the corruption of emotions and desires. The false and frail human nature cannot endure! All is ruined and extinguished! I hope that mortals will stand in sacred places and open the pure flower of their heart while stepping towards a bright future. Within this Jade Pond I sit in a lofty and pure position. I hope that mortals can learn from my example. Do not let the filth of the world bury your life!" ...The lotus flower finished speaking and moved its leaves (body) to bow to the Golden Mother before becoming still again. I never thought that Princess Lotus Flower would share such miraculous teachings. It was truly "from the mouth of a golden lotus"!

Golden Mother: The lotus flower is a sacred incarnation that represents a pure and lofty spirit. Therefore, immortals and buddhas all sit on lotus flowers and use them in their teachings. Those who attain cultivation sit upon a nine-tiered lotus flower. I will now return to the goldfish and order them to speak. Goldfish, goldfish! Your bodies are full of brilliance and while living in a fish bowl you accompany people throughout their lives. You have seen many mortals and certainly have something which you would like them to understand! Open your golden mouth and spill forth some pearls and jade!

Mr. Yang: After the Golden Mother spoke, a goldfish leapt from the water and exerting itself it opened its mouth saying: "I am friends with the lotus flower and together we live within this pond. I am very active and all day I swim about. My joy is boundless. My lotus sister is shy and does not dare to follow me as I swim about as she is afraid of going too deep. Yet my good circumstances are often fleeting as my owner catches me with a net and drags me to the surface. I am used by some people as bait and children see me and think that I am cute. Children surround and abuse me and if I am liked by a customer my owner will sell me and I am taken from a large pond and placed inside a tiny fishbowl. From this time on I live within this small universe. I

accept my fate as my life passes by. However, I have actually become a supervisory god over humanity. Every action and movement is performed within my sight. I am used to this type of life and do not blame anyone for my situation. When people are troubled they stay near me and gaze at me with compassionate eyes while their hearts think, ‘Although goldfish live in a tiny fishbowl they have no worries and can swim about freely. They do not have to worry about food or clothing. They just need clear water and are clothed in beautiful scales. They can stay immersed in water without rotting and are very bright. Their lives are better than those of people on earth who live in large buildings and whose hearts and minds are troubled.’ Look at some average clothes that are washed a few times. They quickly become discolored and deteriorate and no longer look as good as they once did. I love the natural, golden scales that I was born with. I do not want to show off but many people admire them. My clothing lasts a lifetime and is very durable. All I need is fresh water and they become as clean as when they were new. People’s clothes require laundry detergent and bleach and even then stains are not washed clean. People fight for fame and fortune and they complain without rest. These annoying people are often loathed. I guard my original spirit and if I am given a glass of clean water I feel content. If I break my own fishbowl would I not be destroying myself? My body only survives in water, you live on land. If you leave the Way of life you too will be nearing a dark death! I hope that people offer their best more often. They will then be like me and cause others to appreciate life and be happy!”...After speaking the goldfish leapt back into the water and nodded at the Golden Mother. After hearing these two wonderful treasures speak I feel that every creation is intelligent and has a spirit. I do not want to disparage mankind but these teachings and truths were very interesting!

Golden Mother: Every creation has a spirit and is endowed with the spiritual protection of the universe. Therefore, every spirit has the ability to transcend the mortal world. Of the three realms the human is most precious and cultivation within is the easiest. I hope that this process of cultivation will not be abandoned. Sentient beings that wish to beseech the *qi* and light of Xi Hua can read the following poem aloud:

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

Ji Gong: Time is short and we will come again at a later date to visit the Golden Mother. We bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful to the Golden Mother for compassionately helping me resolve my confusions. I bid farewell to the Golden Mother. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
April 17, 1980

20th Journey: Third Journey to Listen at the Xi Hua Palace... Teachings of the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond

Poem: Zhuang Zi leisurely dreams of butterflies. On a clear, deep night the monk ablaze returns on a boat. The world's emotions are confused and follow the wind. Eliminate teaching the constants and all affairs are for naught.

Ji Gong: The paradisiacal halls of heaven are by no means in a remote and distant location. If you are able to prepare yourself to travel to this location and work to wash yourself clean while removing all the filth from your heart then this patch of overgrown weeds will grow into a sacred location. It will also be transformed into gold, jade, and crystal and become a Pure Land which is paradise. The halls of heaven are already in front of you. If you want to fly above this is also not a difficult task. People do not have wings so how can they fly? First, you must put your mind at ease. Second, you must purify yourself of any debts. Then, even if you have no wings you will fill like a hydrogen balloon and gracefully float upwards. Conversely, even if you had an enormous pair of wings but your heart was weighted down and guilt filled your body, the stones of worry would drag you down and creditors would grasp you tightly. I could then see that your technique to return to heaven is deficient. Today, the time to travel to heaven and author this book has arrived. I will guide my worthy disciple Mr. Yang to again visit the Jade Pond. Prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: ... We have already arrived at the Jade Pond. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform and prepare to greet the Golden Mother!

Mr. Yang: Arriving at the Jade Pond I feel intense feelings of caring. The Golden Mother fondly cares for me as her child and her kindness is very deep. I have followed my teacher through the three worlds searching for truth and I have received many benefits. ... I respectfully bow before the Golden Mother. Golden Mother, please bestow upon us the light of your spirit!

Golden Mother: Yes! My son Yang has returned again to my residence and I feel extremely happy! As mother I miss all original spirits and my heart aches for them. Fortunately, *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is being written which alerts people if they are on the wrong path, saves sentient beings, and reassures this mother's heart. My son Yang, follow me to view this location and ensure that sentient beings are aware of the miraculous sights here at the Jade Pond!

Mr. Yang: Ahead there is a large fruit garden and it appears that inside there are peaches growing. Each peach is ripe and smells very fragrant which causes one to

drool with desire. This type of peach is many times larger than those found in the mortal world. Is this what people call an “immortal peach”? Beneath these peach trees there are many immortal children and female immortals at play. There are also many Daoist immortals on stone stools talking and playing checkers. Yet others are picking and eating the immortal peaches. They live within this appealing and worry-free environment which is envied by people. What kind of person can have this type of enjoyment?

Golden Mother: This is the Immortal Peach Paradise. In the three worlds only the Jade Pond contains the *qi* necessary to grow these immortal peaches. The entire garden of immortal peaches is ripe and waiting to be picked and eaten by those mortals who have attained cultivation!

Mr. Yang: There is a guard outside the garden. Can I enter?

Golden Mother: The immortal peach garden is guarded by immortals and sages. Those people who are not completely cultivated with sufficient merit cannot enter and feast upon the immortal peaches. Those immortal children, female immortals, and lofty sages within the garden are able noble guests and masters of the Jade Pond. Today they have cultivated themselves and thus can come to this carefree location and eat the fruits of the Way!

Mr. Yang: It has been said that after you have cultivated yourself in the true fruits you must travel to the Jade Pond and accept a gift of an immortal peach from the Golden Mother which prolongs your life. What does this mean?

Golden Mother: The immortal peach is shaped like a person’s heart. Therefore, you could say that the immortal peach is planted within the “soil of the heart.” If people diligently pursue cultivation and attain sufficient merit they will shed their mortal shell and ascend above. Here, they will be invited to a banquet of immortal peaches at the Jade Pond and the rank of lotus will be bestowed upon them. Therefore, to eat the immortal peaches of the Jade Pond represents that one has achieved fruits in the Way, will never be reborn, and will forever enjoy the nobility of heaven. Therefore, when mortals cultivate the soil of their heart it cannot produce poisonous thoughts. If it does so the immortal peach tree becomes dry and is forgotten and in the end there will be no fruit of the Way that one can enjoy. Now is the time to pursue cultivation and the result here at the immortal peach trees of the Jade Pond will be multiplied. The fruit is waiting to be enjoyed by all sentient beings and I hope that they do not miss this opportunity. We will enter the garden and ask questions of those lofty sages playing checkers!

Mr. Yang: Yes! The guards see the Golden Mother coming and immediately let us enter. ...Golden Immortal, how did you attain cultivation and achieve this fruit? How did you feel after arriving here at the Jade Pond?

Golden Immortal: Mr. Yang from the mortal realm has come to ask me questions. Please sit and we will talk during the next game of checkers. Is that okay?

Mr. Yang: I do not understand this game of checkers. If the pieces were numbered I could play.

Golden Immortal: Ha, ha! The piece that you have picked up is the Buddha's Pearl. This is very interesting! Buddhists and bodhisattvas meditate with their rosaries by counting each bead and saying the Buddha's name aloud. When engaged in a game of checkers one must still observe the saying, "In checkers, a true gentleman will not heed advice from others and a true winner will not change his last move even if he commits a mistake." Within silence one may fight and defeat all demons while marching forward bravely and with spirit. Therefore, to move pieces on a checkerboard without speaking is much like saying the Buddha's name aloud while counting beads on a rosary. Moreover, this silent victory has sound when the pieces move! To master this game of checkers takes profound skill and it is certainly not something an "outsider" can learn. Ha, ha! Playing checkers is like reciting the Buddha's name, one must be skilled!

Mr. Yang: How can it be! The Golden Immortal's miraculous teachings are like pearls! I did not know that you were well versed in history.

Golden Immortal: Cultivation is a lifelong task that cannot be stopped on the first day. In checkers, if you do not advance you retreat which, like the ambush of the Chu by the Han,⁵²⁷ can lead to crisis in all directions. It does not matter if you win or lose you must make decisions quickly and only then will you have the courage to leave this mortal life of filth. While on earth I worshipped the Daoist Patriarch Tai Shang, Master Lu, and Guanyin, as well as other immortals and Buddhas while studying the Way. I diligently sought after truth and assisted all mortals by energetically aiding the poor, making other's path in life easier, publishing morality books, and sharing the words of the scriptures, etc. When my merit was sufficient and after I returned to the realm of immortals my spirit traveled to the Jade Pond. Here, I bathed in the waters of the Jade Pond and ate the immortals peaches, which I was completely free to take and use as I pleased. You could say that my existence was that of boundless joy. I hope that mortals understand this evanescent dream⁵²⁸ and quickly cultivate themselves in the great Way. At a later date, they can arrive here and discuss the Way and its mysteries.

Mr. Yang: May I ask, Immortal Sister how did you attain true fruits of the Way?

Immortal Aunt: While alive I studied to become a tailor and after my studies were complete I opened my own business. A friend introduced me to a teacher and I studied

⁵²⁷ This well-known story is featured in both traditional music and contemporary film.

⁵²⁸ This saying, employed earlier, is from the story of a man who dreamed marvelous things only to find that he had fallen asleep while cooking his millet.

the Way while becoming a vegetarian. On the one hand I made money from my business and on the other I cultivated my body and enlightened my mind. I was half-sage and half-mortal. Every time that I met with a customer I exhorted them to seek the Way and cultivation. If I saw someone in need I gave them assistance. I was married at twenty-five and my husband also devoutly cultivated himself at home. As husband and wife we were cultivated and encouraged each other together. To study the virtues of heaven alone was not enough and to have a knowledgeable companion in the Way was very satisfying. I had two boys and one girl who all studied diligently, observed moral regulations, and kind-heartedly taught others. All of my life I pursued goodness without rest and saved countless people. I lived to be sixty-two and died without having been ill. My spirit floated to the Jade Pond, where I travel freely, and was received by the Golden Mother who made me an Immortal Aunt of the Still Moon. My husband returned to this immortal realm a year later and he is currently pursuing cultivation at the Dong Hua Palace where he has achieved a lofty rank. I hope that mortals pursue cultivation and focus not only on cultivating their own virtue but also on serving others, which is more important. If one happens upon a person in need they should show sympathy and give assistance. This compassion comes from the heart and increases one's merit. If you are without kindness it will be very difficult to attain the Way. While pursuing cultivation one cannot be proud or arrogant and must feel satisfied. When one listens to the sages and teachers from the past they should be similarly respectful of each teacher and cannot slander their teachings or take them too lightly. These are techniques for cultivating one's own virtue. Some people cultivate themselves and save others. Yet if one is resentful of the teachings of other religions their hearts will become split and this damages the strength within people. Those who attain cultivation in contemporary times often neglect this issue which causes their fruits in the Way to be deficient. Because one still lives within the mortal world their vision is not clear. People study but are unsure. I hope that those who hear my words will quickly reform themselves so that their work in the Way achieves accomplishments. Only then will they not be lacking! Remember these words.

Mr. Yang: Hearing these two speak, I feel as if the pursuit of cultivation is not achieved by luck. The path that each person takes to cultivation is filled with challenges and every type of trial. Only after this can they attain success. Moreover, in our dealings with others we must act our best and must not bear any grudges towards other religions. Within the spirit world, I have seen that immortals and buddhas are all very harmonious and considerate to each other. I believe that the wealthy must abandon their selfish ways and only then will they obtain entrance to this carefree world of spirits. Otherwise, the residents of this spirit world would fight amongst each other and this sacred realm would no longer be peaceful. According to that which I have seen, although those sacred spirits who are able to travel to this spirit world each have their own religious understanding they can all comprehend selflessness and know how to ascend beyond a material understanding. Only then can they exist within this lofty paradise. Otherwise, when their spirit arrives at this type of selfless paradise still

accustomed to the person they were in life they are automatically expelled from this realm and are unable to enter this empty, lofty, and pure realm.

Golden Mother: What my son Yang has said is correct. The mortals of this universe are as infants. Each religion attacks the other, which causes their collapse, until none can be saved. Perhaps the teachings within each religion are different, but their final goal is the same! I sincerely hope that sentient beings will each take their own hearts and examine them, cultivate them, and achieve success. The lofty realm of heaven welcomes all those cultivated beings who comprehend soundlessness and formlessness. If one is unable to purify the three hearts they will fly in all directions but find it very difficult to achieve the lofty ninth rank of the lotus flower. Like that which my son Yang has seen today, the beings here are a friendly crowd that have broken free from the vulgar world and the world of form to a realm without form. Therefore, they are able to attain extraordinary positions. How ever much mortals comprehend and cultivate themselves is how much they will attain. Thus, I hope that mortals will recognize and return to truth. With virtuous hearts they will not harm each other and build a prosperous humanity while following the Way and returning here. They will peacefully attain their goal while cultivating the body and supporting their nature and they will enter the Jade Pond and live together in heaven!

Ji Gong: We are grateful for the Golden Mother's merciful teachings and further instructions. I believe that mortals are certainly able to attain goodness and return to their Mother's embrace. By dispelling their evil nature and pursuing virtue from now till forever they will overcome their own shortcomings and no longer be greedy, angry, or foolish. They will also not be lewd, gamble, or be dishonest and quickly return to good. Thus, mortals will climb the ladder to heaven and avoid descending to hell while asking for assistance. Our time today is short and we must bid farewell to the Golden Mother. We will inform those below about this sacred Xi Hua realm. Mr. Yang, thank the Golden Mother and prepare to return to your temple.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Golden Mother for bestowing your spiritual light upon me and increasing my intelligence. I will repay your kindness by following your teachings, saving others, and achieving your great wish! I bid you farewell, Golden Mother!

Golden Mother: You are very hard-working Ji Gong and my son Yang. To save sentient beings you have traveled through the three realms and written *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* which has already saved the entire world. You have obtained merit from rousing these beings and have reassured this Mother's heart. Now my son Yang's spirit has traveled to this heavenly realm to seek truth and author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. This will introduce the scenery here in heaven and save mortals. My heart is full of joy and I will bestow upon you this poem and an immortal peach which will prolong your life and extend your knowledge!

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Golden Mother for giving us this heavenly poem and immortal peach. I will wait to taste it! I bid you farewell. I am already sitting on the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to my temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
May 7, 1980

21st Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Bei Hua Palace...Teachings of Holy Lord Bei Hua

Poem: *Water flowing through the green mountains is illuminated by the moon. The traveler's heart floats as a small boat. The cooling shade of the bamboo trees eliminates the summer heat. The body without obstructions is joyful and at ease.*

Ji Gong: Pursuing cultivation is like piloting a boat. One must use their intelligence and vision to determine a course or they will be capsized on the Sea of Bitterness. If one is a little careless they will sink and drown. The ferryboat that usually carries passengers will thus become an instrument of death. Therefore, when those who are cultivated use their intelligent eyes and are enlightened with the Way firmly in their hearts why would they seek the Way deep within the mountains or climb a tree to get a fish?⁵²⁹ They will certainly be unsuccessful! People all say that they are correct, so who should be believed? I am telling you “believe in me and be saved” and this “me” is my “self or true self.” If one does not have belief in or have control over themselves how can they become cultivated and enlightened? The time to continue this book has arrived and I will guide Mr. Yang to travel to the sacred realm.

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting on the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: Today we will travel to the Bei Hua Palace and pay our respects to Lord Bei Hua. We will respectfully ask him to speak which will ensure that *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is replete with glorious teachings.

Mr. Yang: Our journeys through the heavens of the Five Elders have already taken up much time. Today we are traveling to the Bei Hua Palace to see something new. I look all around and feel as if I am in a cold forest. There is also a moist *qi*. Why is this?

Ji Gong: Bei Hua is where the essence of the *qi* of water forms. Thus, you have this feeling. For detailed teachings ask Lord Bei Hua.

Mr. Yang: Okay. I follow my teacher and dismount from the lotus flower platform. We walk forward and I feel waves of cold. ...There is a towering palace before us that looks like clear crystal. You can clearly see both the outside and inside and it emits rays of light. It looks like car headlights in the rain and is a little bit startling. Arriving before the palace the words “Bei Hua Essence of Water Palace” are written above the door. It is glorious here and engenders respect. There is an elderly man sitting within the palace who appears solemn but has a friendly smile.

Ji Gong: Quickly pay your respects to Lord Bei Hua!

⁵²⁹ This common saying means “to seek something from the wrong source.”

Mr. Yang: Your servant Mr. Yang has received orders to arrive today with his teacher to the Bei Hua Palace and pay his respects. Please Lord Bei Hua, enlighten us!

Lord Bei Hua: Bei Hua is a location where the mountains are bright and the waters are fair. This northern location is filled with water and therefore you feel cold. Yet if you came to this location during the summer it would be like entering a freezer which, though as cold as swallowing ice water, would not cause you to feel cold. During the summer Bei Hua is like an air-conditioned room and is a sacred location where one can escape from the heat. If one whose strength in the Way is sufficient enters this realm they will feel comfortable and cool. Conversely, if one's body is weak or filled with a dark *qi* they will quickly freeze to death. Therefore, mortals should treat each other warmly so that at a later date they will be able to enjoy a pure, comfortable, and cool life at this palace of water in the heaven of the Five Elders. If people's hearts are dark, cold, and impure their bodies will fill with a dark *qi* and as soon as they encounter the cold here the saying "three feet of ice is not the result of one cold day" will apply! The gates to the underworld will automatically open and welcome your arrival.

Mr. Yang: What Lord Bei Hua has said is correct. People should be "honest and upright" and only then will they be able to regulate their temperature. If one feels cold they have no emotions and have removed themselves from the embrace of the universe. Lord Bei Hua, how did you originate? How should your virtue be studied?

Lord Bei Hua: Of the Five Elders, I am the "Elder of Water" or the "Essence of Water." Water is the primary element needed for all things to grow. Animals, plants, and birds all need their fill of me. Fish and shrimp live even deeper within my embrace. Seventy percent of the human body is comprised of water. When a person is thirsty or dehydrated and has consumed all the water in their body they will perish. The flow of blood is like water and is the fountain of life. If people do not stubbornly guard and avoid losing the essence of their blood their vitality will decrease and they will become sleepy and confused. Not only will it be difficult to become a person, it will be even harder to become an immortal or buddha. As for studying the water techniques of cultivation, there are many ways to go about it. I will now give you an example of several as reference for all sentient beings:

1. Water is like a mirror and can be used to illuminate oneself. When the lake of the heart is calm and without waves it reflects one's original appearance which is pure and new as if it has been washed. Mountains, rivers, earth, grass, flowers, and trees, all appear as reflections within the water. Therefore, when mortals calm (clean)⁵³⁰ the lake of their heart they will avoid the Sea of Bitterness.

2. Water is supple in nature. This suppleness can overcome that which is hard. When it floods the mountains, forests, fields, and houses are washed away which demonstrates

⁵³⁰ Both calm and clean are pronounced *jing*.

that though water is supple it is strong. Enormous boulders are reduced to sand by the flow of water which exceeds the strength of machines. When people are together they should be supple as water and avoid grating against each other which will cause injuries.

3. People must use water everyday to wash their face, brush their teeth, cook rice, boil vegetables, bathe, clean appliances, mop the floor, and flush the toilet. Also, the vessels of the world travel freely and this transportation is in part due to me. The nature of water is to flow to the lowest point. Thus, one should be modest and polite. The natural disposition of water is as bright as crystal. It supports all living beings and I hope that mortals will learn from this spirit of service and sacrifice and become a Golden Immortal of water!

Mr. Yang: Elder Water's contribution to humanity is enormous. Without water there would be no "life" thus it is called "living water."⁵³¹ Lord Bei Hua, please explain again the phenomena of your life and share with mortals more of your mysteries.

Lord Bei Hua: Okay. The north is charged with managing "water," of the five constants it is "chastity," of the five colors it is "black," of the four season it is "winter," and it was reincarnated as the Black Lord "Prince Tang."⁵³² Of the five human relationships it is "wisdom," within the human body it is "kidney and bone," and of the five prohibitions it is "liquor."

1. Water (Kidney, Bone): Water is necessary to maintain life. People are unable to be without it for even a day. In ancient times, people got water from wells and rivers. Now this has been replaced with running water and I am now found in each house. If I do not come for three days won't these people become very worried? Without water how could farmers grow vegetables or rice? Without water fish and shrimp would immediately die and boats could not move. People should study all of the ways that water helps. Yet modern people are "fickle and lascivious,"⁵³³ floating about with no knowledge of where to return. People's hearts are steadily declining and sinking into a Sea of Bitterness that knows no bounds. Return to the shore! Although water is very beneficial to humanity people do not value it! People's bodies need "essence" as the source of life. This essence congeals to form "bone" and is stored within the "kidneys." Modern people have excessive desires and thus the water from their kidneys is consumed excessively. When the source of this water becomes dry the muscles and bones become weak and one's waist and back will ache. Therefore, when one conserves "used water" in the kidneys (water tank) they store this essence. When this essence is maintained one's life may be prolonged. After people have attained cultivation "water and fire working as one" they will achieve the Way. Thus when "nature is nourished and essence is valued" one has attained cultivation.

⁵³¹ This also means "flowing water."

⁵³² Prince Tang overthrew Jie of the Xia Dynasty and established the Shang Dynasty in 1766 BCE.

⁵³³ This saying literally means "The nature of water and willow catkins."

2. Chastity: Water is pure and clean. Its nature is supple like a woman and thus it is called, “chaste and pure.” The darkness within people’s hearts deeply influences their evil behavior. Unrestrained behavior that is greedy, lewd, and not chaste has created a river of mud. The (clean) water of these teachings is a good method of washing away this filth. This is the time to wash away filth by using this virtuous water to cleanse all of humanity’s evil and restore them to their original “pure and clean” natures. Only then will they attain the brave essence of Bei Hua!

3. Winter (Black): The winter is cold and people must wear additional clothing to protect themselves. In the cycle of the four seasons the harvest occurs during fall and is stored during winter. Contemporary people live in large skyscrapers with steel bars, iron gates, and impenetrable locks. They live in seclusion and without company their emotions become cold. These people are alone (winter) and their bodies are concealed within (storehouse). In these contemporary times society also has its “dark” side. If one wants to accommodate both water and fire they must selflessly open their heart and reflect upon that which is dark. Not able to allow the cold wind to blow each person hides covered by blankets within their house. Only then can they break through the darkness and again see the light!

4. Wisdom (Liquor): The north is charged with managing water and of the five human relationships it is wisdom. Wisdom is like water and is called the “Sea of Wisdom” and “Water of Wisdom.” Wisdom must be pure and bright, like water it can change in countless ways according to each person’s nature. Yet when people use “liquor” they drown this wisdom which then becomes confused and murky. Moreover, after one has consumed liquor their nature is confused and their actions that cause injury to the Way and loss to virtue increase. Thus the warning, “To be intoxicated harms the rivers and mountains.” I hope that all mortals are aware of this.

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! An unrequited love, an inch of time is worth an inch of gold, running water does not return. It has been revealed to mortals to guard the Way and do not lose it. To sail a boat against the current tests the will of those cultivated. Mortals, you must be willing to harness the vessel of mercy and ascend to the realm of the Buddha or sink into the Sea of Bitterness!

Mr. Yang: The teachings of Lord Bei Hua are in sync with the contemporary world. Each sentence was filled with a truth that penetrated my heart. I hope that Lord Bei Hua will not be stingy in bestowing more teachings.

Lord Bei Hua: Many sicknesses arise in the bodies of sentient beings whose water is weak and fire flourishes. I will now bestow the teachings of the Bei Hua spirit that, if sentient beings sincerely read them aloud, will produce a fountain of the spirit with wonderful results. Charm of the spirit:

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

Because time is short I will guide Mr. Yang to see the wonderful Palace of Crystal Waters at a later date.

Ji Gong: We are grateful that Lord Bei Hua has bestowed upon us these miraculous words. I must guide my worthy disciple Yang back to his temple.

Mr. Yang: Lord Bei Hua has covered us with his merciful teachings which sentient beings will accept and follow. I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, let us return to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
May 19, 1980

22nd Journey: Return to and Listen at the Bei Hua Palace... Teachings of Holy Lord Bei Hua

Poem: An enduring summer day dissolves one hundred feet of ice. The heart not ashamed to divulge rides the wind and clouds. The butcher who puts down their knife becomes Buddha. Everywhere the compassionate, jade dew of the lotus congeals.

Ji Gong: A summer day is able to melt one hundred foot icebergs. Warm and compassionate emotions can similarly influence the selfishness and animosity of the mortal world. When in your heart you feel no trace of “shame” you will have no more worries and be free to travel in all directions. Put down the “butcher’s knife” that you use to kill people, slaughter people, and harm people. Foster your feelings of compassion and do not deceive others. Everywhere floats the “golden lotus” and on the lotus leaves there are drops of “jade dew” which have cleansed the “blood stains” on the butcher’s knife and restored your bright appearance. Today, I will again guide Mr. Yang to the Bei Hua realm. Worthy disciple, prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please teacher, take off.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at Bei Hua’s Water Essence Palace. Let us proceed forward and pay our respects to Lord Bei Hua (Prince of Water Essence). We will ask Lord Bei Hua to guide you to view the scenery here and open your eyes.

Mr. Yang: Okay. Bei Hua Palace is surrounded by a different atmosphere. Right now the weather in the mortal world is very hot. When I turn back and observe my human body it is sweating profusely. Yet my spirit has arrived at this location and is extremely cool. ... We are already in front of the palace and there are many cultivated sages and lofty beings. These beings come and go and look relaxed which is enviable. ... I, Mr. Yang, pay my humble respects to Lord Bei Hua. Today, I have returned with my teacher. Please Lord Bei Hua, bestow upon us your golden words.

Lord Bei Hua: Yes! Today, Mr. Yang has again arrived at my “humble residence”⁵³⁴ but I am not sure what you would have me teach you.

Mr. Yang: I cannot stand it! The words that have come from Lord Bei Hua’s mouth cause my “heart to cool” and I cannot bear it. Is it possible that Lord Bei Hua intends to test me?

Lord Bei Hua: My “humble home” is not wealthy and we only have a cup of “cold tea” to offer you. Mr. Yang, do not be polite and drink!

⁵³⁴ This means both “humble residence” and “cold residence,” in reference to the temperature.

Ji Gong: Lord Bei Hua has kindly given you some “Water Essence Tea” which is not inferior to Guanyin’s “Beverage of Sweet Dew.” Only the fortunate can sample these types of wonderful drinks. There is no need to be polite, quickly drink! Tell us how it tastes.

Mr. Yang: In one gulp I finish this pure and cool “Water Essence Tea” and I feel as if my whole body has been cooled by an air conditioner. It is much like eating shaved ice and is extremely cool.

Lord Bei Hua: This tea is a wonderful beverage produced in Bei Hua. It detoxifies the blood and reduces one’s heat. Those who love to drink tea know that high-grade tea leaves are grown on the tops of cold mountains. Only tea grown on these frozen peaks is able to receive the nourishment of the spirit of Bei Hua’s water essence. Therefore, it has the ability to detoxify. Today, Mr. Yang has arrived at my humble Bei Hua residence. It is only proper that I give you a cup of my cool tea and I hope that you are not offended!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Lord Bei Hua’s gift of this excellent tea. The Lord’s teachings have been light like water yet I feel that their lightness carries a deep and flavorful meaning that exceeds the sweetness of mountain flowers and fruits!

Lord Bei Hua: This is so. To give a person one cup of water to quench their thirst exceeds the gift of silver coins. The majority of mortals are concerned with small matters and unwilling to assist others. This type of cold and harmful *qi* is not welcome. I hope that mortals will offer some of their own sweat in the assistance of others. I believe that after your metabolism has been boosted,⁵³⁵ both your body and mind will benefit. Look at running water. It is clean, clear, and lively and everybody enjoys playing in it. Stagnant water is rotten and breeds insects. Nobody is willing to approach it. Would you like to be a person who is “firm and dead” or one who is “gentle and alive”? This depends entirely on whether you are one who guards to death their “flow of wealth” or is willing to share this “flow of wealth” with others. If you donate this money to those in need and let this flow of wealth “circulate,” only then will you not allow this wealth to give birth to bacterium and hinder your health. Mortals who want to come to the Five Elder’s Heaven of Water Essence must certainly have a lively “spirit of wealth dispersal.” Those stingy misers who tightly guard their wealth will travel to hell on their own “private” path. I will now lead Mr. Yang to observe the Bei Hua realm and reveal it to mortals.

Mr. Yang: Lord Bei Hua’s words are all truthful and wonderful.

Lord Bei Hua: Please follow me!

⁵³⁵ This also means, “To replace the old with the new.”

Mr. Yang: Following behind Lord Bei Hua is much like standing in the shade of a tree and I can feel his cool and invigorating *qi*. The lofty immortals coming and going nod to us as we pass. ... We reach a location where there is a mountain in front of us and from the top flows a fast-moving stream. This stream becomes a beautiful waterfall and the sound of falling water can be heard from afar. It is like heavenly music and a marvelous sight. What significance does this water have?

Lord Bei Hua: This verifies what I have just said. This pure, rushing spring is clear enough that you can see all the way to the bottom. It has no bacterium and has a lively life producing much spray. Its appearance is stunning and the songs it produces are carefree and relaxed. If you look you can see that there are an innumerable amount of fish and shrimp living downstream. This rushing water surges and has an enterprising spirit which inspires mortals to not be lazy. They should study the waters ability to strive continuously for self-improvement. Only thus will people not cause their muscles and bones to stiffen. Their flow of wealth can then be shared according to one's spirit and surplus wealth can be given to assist sentient beings. Like this sweet spring is shared with others establishes innumerable merit.

Mr. Yang: Water represents such "deep and vast" meaning. Its "latent" compassion is boundless and Lord Bei Hua's merit is truly enormous.

Lord Bei Hua: Please follow me again!

Mr. Yang: Okay. We take another small road where there is dry land and the vegetation is yellow and withered. In front of us there is a mountain of yellow earth that has grown no grass and shows no signs of life. There is a large pond of muddy water beneath the mountain. The water is not flowing and I can see no life within. What does this mean? Why are there two different types of water in this miraculous realm?

Lord Bei Hua: This mountain is called "Yellow Spring Mountain" and the pond below it is "Yellow Spring Pond." This pond goes directly to the netherworld and thus hell is called the "yellow springs." The water of these yellow springs is "stagnant" because it does not flow. It also does not support life. Thus the vegetation nearby is withered and the land is cracked. If people regard their flow of wealth selfishly and refuse to share a drop to help others they will become as the insects born from this stagnant water. You can see this yellow mountain on earth where all corpses decompose and become yellow earth. Here, filthy yellow water collects as a yellow pond and the bodies immersed within finally decompose to become white bones. What then do you have? When people foster a true *qi* and prepare to ascend to heaven they assist others more often and join an everlasting flow of virtue. If not, the entire body is filled with a "foul copper *qi*" that creates a flow of muddy *qi* until one at last descends to the flow of filth. After death these people will naturally arrive at the yellow springs. If one is able to maintain a pure heart and does not tread upon dark paths and evil roads after death they will bathe in clean waters. Their dharma body will emerge and

they will drink the sweet tea of Bei Hua's water essence. This will cool their body and mind and they will awake from the big dream of the mortal world, shed their bodies, and arrive at the paradisiacal halls of heaven. Would you like to choose those waters? Do not jump into the wrong one.

Mr. Yang: Lord Bei Hua's words moved me considerably. Heaven and hell have no separate roads but were originally distinguished by these pure and filthy waters.

Lord Bei Hua: I will again guide you to view the "Water Crystal Palace" and explain Bei Hua's process of cultivation.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful that Lord Bei Hua has taken the time to direct me. I hope to hear more about the great Way of Bei Hua.

Lord Bei Hua: Follow me to the "Water Crystal Palace" to inquire after the Way.

Mr. Yang: The road to heaven is vast and limitless and is able to accommodate all types of cultivated people. People's hearts and natures only need conform to this location's "climate" and "environment" to be able to arrive at this true path. ...Following in Lord Bei Hua's footsteps we again travel to a new location. In front of us appears a vast and spacious palace. The walls are opaque and spotless and the words "Water Crystal Palace and Monastery" are inscribed above.

Lord Bei Hua: This is the "Water Crystal Palace." Inside there are lofty sages, fish, and shrimp refining themselves in the Way. You can enter and ask them questions.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir. Inside, the *qi* is intense and I feel as if some power is repelling my spirit!

Ji Gong: Do not be frightened. Because the lofty sages inside are concentrating their vitality and cultivating their Bei Hua *qi* they have produced enough spiritual power to topple mountains and invert the seas. Therefore, you have this feeling. You can ask them questions of the Way.

Mr. Yang: Okay. ...They are all emitting rays of light and the tops of their heads are encircled by a white light. Although ice cold I can feel that they are producing a hot power. ...May I ask this lofty sage to explain what this type of technique of refinement this is called? How can sentient beings study it?

Daoist Elder: The mortal world's Mr. Yang has come to visit. This is a wonderful fate! There are many techniques of cultivation and in terms of my own process of cultivation there are actually no secrets. While on earth I was extremely wealthy. Yet I thought little of money and much of the Way. I was not willing to become a slave to my fortune so every time I heard of a location that had met with disaster or was impoverished I provided relief. I provided money for construction, education, and

agriculture. Because I contributed generously I was called a “virtuous person” and an “immortal who disperses wealth.” In my later years I became vegetarian, pursued cultivation, shared the words of the scriptures with others, encouraged people to do good, changed my habits, and performed charitable work. Because I was charitable my entire life many benefited from my influence. When I was seventy-eight I departed the mortal world. My merit was sufficient and I arrived in the heaven of the Five Elders to continue my cultivation. I am now cultivating my original spirit within the Water Crystal Palace and I have already achieved the stage of circular light. If while alive I had been greedy or extravagant with my wealth, I believe that today I would be trapped within the yellow springs. My entire body would be contaminated with filth and I would not be within this carefree and boundless realm. Therefore, I feel extremely fortunate that I was not confused by wealth. If one can observe the principle “honor” and always care about others then immortals and Buddhas will also care about you and struggle for your arrival here. Thus today I am able to arrive at this location without sorrows or worries all because I provided some assistance to people on earth. I hope that people will cultivate themselves in the truth and not take what is false for what is true. Thus, they will avoid being miserably imprisoned forever in “false thoughts.”

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for your teachings. Only those people who can abandon selfishness can attain this type of honorable and unselfish joy! Heaven is truly just. These fish and shrimp swim about joyfully but I do not know what their experience in the Way has been... As soon as I finished speaking these words a large prawn opened its mouth and said: “You should not look down upon your brothers and sisters in the water. We are able to be at this location today and also have an extraordinary history. Please calmly listen! Fish and shrimp are beings whose bodies are soft but have large appetites. Yet throughout our lives we eat only plants and algae from the rivers and oceans. We certainly never invade the food sources of our companions. Our bodies remain virtuous and pure throughout our lives and thus we are able to arrive at this location. Although we are called fish or shrimp, my heart is no different than the immortals or Buddhas. Therefore, we will soon escape this form and become people and appear the same as the other lofty sages. Many of the lofty sages here were originally a fish or shrimp. As long as they have cultivated themselves completely and their skill has matured they can shed their previous shell. Mortals also reside within a false shell. I hope that mortals are not too attached to their human bodies and believe that they are superior to other birds and beasts. If so, when they shed their mortal bodies they will be reborn as one of these animals and continue their existence in the cycle of life and death.”

Mr. Yang: We are grateful to Lord Bei Hua for granting upon us your instructions. I hope that from today on I will be able to employ the spirit and light of these teachings. I respectfully bid Lord Bei Hua farewell.

Lord Bei Hua: Ji Gong and Mr. Yang are both hardworking. I am willing to bestow Bei Hua's water of wisdom to enhance Mr. Yang's spiritual nature and to assist in the salvation of sentient beings by removing obstructions.

Mr. Yang: I am very grateful for Lord Bei Hua's benevolence... When I obeyed this sacred mandate I became more cultivated and virtuous in order to assist others. ...I am already aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
May 29, 1980

23rd Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Zhong Hua Palace... Teachings of Holy Lord Zhong Hua

Poem: *The gods and immortals love reading at home most. Pure and lofty virtue certainly has no flaws. Golden scriptures and jade charms congealed in the qi of the Way. To travel beyond this world one must harness the cloud vehicle.*

Ji Gong: A pure and lofty virtue, a spirit that is light, and golden scriptures and jade charms that are read, together form a circle of *qi* which turns into a white cloud and travels freely throughout heaven. The mortal body that sinks into evil and treads on this white cloud will spread a filthy and impure *qi* and fall into hell! Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform. We will prepare to travel to a new location!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please teacher, take off. Where are we going today?

Ji Gong: Today we will visit “Elder Huang’s” residence the “Zhong Hua Palace”... We have already arrived at the Zhong Hua Palace. We will prepare to pay our respects to Lord Zhong Hua.

Mr. Yang: Okay. The surroundings here are suitable for people. The vegetation is lush and flocks of birds soar above. Before me there is a majestic, yellow palace. Above the entrance the words “Zhong Hua Palace” are written. On both sides, innumerable sages have lined up to welcome us. I feel very ashamed. How do we dare bother these lofty sages?

Ji Gong: Lord Zhong Hua resides within the center of the Five Elder’s heaven. He is respectfully called “Elder Huang” and his Way is lofty and limitless. We will proceed forward to pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! Within the palace sits a sagely and solemn being. ...Mr. Yang pays his respects to Lord Zhong Hua. Today I have received an edict to follow my teacher Ji Gong through the three realms, author “Journey to the Halls of Heaven,” and exhort people to do good. Please Lord Zhong Hua, reveal your miraculous Way.

Lord Zhong Hua: Yes! The mysteries of this sacred realm will be released within *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Not only will those sentient beings living in the center of the earth⁵³⁶ benefit, but all people under heaven will also receive this glory. Mr. Yang, your roots in the Way are deep and broad. Heaven has bestowed upon you the weighty responsibility of descending to and opening the gates of hell to free ghostly souls from their torment there, to save sentient beings from the human realm and awaken them to the great Way and truth, and to ascend to and open the

⁵³⁶ This references China (and Taiwan) which is also known as the “Middle Kingdom.”

gates of heaven and welcome all sentient beings fated for this location. Your fruit in the Way is plentiful and I congratulate you. I am the first of the Five Elders and I reside within the center or heart of heaven where I govern the ten directions. People are not able to leave land and live thus I, “Elder Earth,” am everywhere. But people’s hearts are not what they once were and the way of the world has pervaded all. The world no longer has a piece of “pure land” and this causes me much grief.

Mr. Yang: Mortals walk in confusion. Therefore, dust and yellow sand fly upwards and cause those who open their eyes to confuse right with wrong and be unable to find their way. Please Lord Zhong Hua, direct us to the correct road.

Lord Zhong Hua: The center, “earth,” is the master of all five elements. Gold, wood, water, and fire can only be established on land. Gold comes from within the earth, wood needs soil to grow, water comes from within the earth, and fire relies on dirt for its brightness. Earth resides within the center and every living being relies on soil for its nourishment. Only with its assistance can there be growth and achievement. Within the earth every type of vegetable, flower, and plant is grown. On top of the earth houses are built and vehicles travel. Although the steamboat travels through water there is still earth and stone beneath that water. Airplanes fly in the sky but still need to land on earth and rest there. Humanity was born on the surface of earth. Food is grown and when it dies it returns to the earth. Thus the saying, “When born of the earth one grows in that earth (and dies)”⁵³⁷ indicates that the relationship between the land and people is very close. If mortals are not able to learn to use the land responsibly and cultivate the moral character of all living things one hundred years after their bodies have returned to the earth their spirits will not be able to return to this sacred and pure realm. In the end they will sink to the filthy soil of hell and live forever in the darkness there while never ascending to this realm. I hope that those mortals who live on the earth are those who will ascend to heaven and not those people who will be concealed (within the earth).

Mr. Yang: The great virtue of earth and the assistances that it has provided to all living beings are truly too many. I hope that Lord Zhong Hua is able to explain the mysterious relationship between Elder Earth and humanity and assist them in their cultivation.

Lord Zhong Hua: Very good. Today I will share with you the miraculous uses of “Elder Earth.” A detailed analysis is listed below. The center manages the “earth,” of the five heavenly constants it is “work,” of the five colors it is “yellow,” on earth it is the “four seasons,” and Elder Earth was reincarnated on earth as “Xuan Yuan.”⁵³⁸ Of the five human virtues it is belief, within the human body it is the “spleen” and “flesh,” and of the five prohibitions it is “ignorance.”

⁵³⁷ This saying also means, “To be born and grow up in the local community.”

⁵³⁸ This was the legendary ruler of virtue who was said to have united warring clans around 2,700 BCE and was later called Huang Di or the Yellow Emperor.

1. Earth: People live on the earth, construct houses, travel on roads, and do not depart from this land. The work of farmers puts them in contact with this land for the most time. Food is cultivation on land. Although fish are born and grow within the water, there is land beneath this water. Although birds fly in the air, at dusk they return to their nests which are within trees that grow out of the land. People get clean water from the ground and dirty water and sewage is poured back. The virtues of earth for mankind are as deep as can be imagined. However, many people do not understand the enormous virtues that this earth has bestowed upon them. These people do not cultivate the land of their hearts and fail to repay the mercy bestowed upon them by the Goddess of Heaven. They stand on this earth and commit evil which disturbs the peace of a "location." Their evil is serious and their spirit will gradually be absorbed by the god of the earth. The road that they travel will become shorter and shorter and they will soon become a prisoner within this "small plot of land" where it will be difficult for them to move an inch a day. This is the consequence for betraying the earth's virtue.

2. Work: Work is heavenly (*yang*) and the way of the earth is heavenly (*yin*). Thus it is said that people were "born of heaven and nurtured by the earth." What humanity needs most to work is dry land. The favor bestowed by heaven and earth is called life. Beneath heaven (and above land), those who did not defend the way of the land and human relationships lost their qualifications to return to heaven. Thus the land cared for all living beings and though heaven was far away and could not be seen, the land was close and could be cultivated.

3. Four Seasons (Yellow): The four seasons are spring, summer, fall, and winter and Elder Earth resides within them all. The earth contains the essence of all seasons and without its cultivation there would be no spring planting, summer growth, fall harvest, and winter fallow. Elder Earth manages future and past, left and right (four seasons). This is like a tree. It does not matter if it is spring, summer, fall, or winter or if the branches and leaves change, the "tree root" remains fixed and unchanging forever. If one cultivates themselves according to these words they will find the Yellow Court within. The center of this court is earth and it is called the "mysterious gate." This controls the human body and all of its activities and is the dwelling of the original gods. If one is able to diligently plow and weed this land throughout the year and its four seasons one will harvest fruits and vegetables from every type of climate and reap an abundant harvest. Yellow is the mystery of the universe. Yellow is a solemn and noble color. Yellow represents luck while black represents the ominous. I hope that mortals will observe the virtuous Way during each of the four seasons. If they travel the yellow path the gods of fortune will descend, disaster will decline, and this propitious yellow light will shine upon all.

4. Belief, Ignorance (Spleen/Flesh): Benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, and belief are the five human constants. Even if one is benevolent, just, polite, and wise they are nothing without belief. Thus one may know that belief is the master of these five constants. The earth is at the center and regulates belief. How is this? The earth is

the most fervent defender of belief. If you plant melon you will reap melon and if you plant beans you will reap beans. This is very straightforward as whatever you plant you will harvest. This process will never cause one's belief to waver or yield to ignorance. However, people often "sweep the floor with their trust" and ruin belief by violating contracts, breaking promises, bouncing checks, repudiating debts, and unceasingly cheating. Those who break their promises or repudiate debts are pursued by their creditors and attempt to hide in many locations. The "known land" is not sufficient and one must run to "lesser lands" where they will not be recognized and avoid being imprisoned in jail. Often people come to the end of the road and their shortsightedness will bury them within the earth. The universe is vast and mortals that do not depart from the practices of belief will have very promising futures. It is actually oneself that directs one to the end of the road and causes travel to become difficult. One then has "no place to hide" and it is quite sad. These are the paths which result in one losing Zhong Hua's earth *qi*. The spleen and stomach are regulated by the earth and manage digestion within the human body. People in contemporary times do not get out of bed and walk upon the earth but instead hurriedly put on shoes and socks and rush to work. This industrial society causes one to live a nervous life. The feet that are separated from the earth for a long time no longer have sufficient earth *qi*. People's consumption of food and water will no longer be steady (lost belief) and thus they will develop many illnesses of digestion. If one wishes to be cured of these ailments they must treat all external affairs calmly and they cannot drink too much or eat at uncertain times. This is like growing grains. Once they have adjusted to the climate they will naturally flourish. One should take more vacations and walks in the countryside. They should forget to walk uptight and be near the grass and soil. They should progress slowly and once their earth *qi* is again sufficient it will be themselves and not their medicine that cured their gastric illness. From the moment that contemporary people leave their homes they rely entirely on modes of transportation and find it "difficult to travel and inch" by walking. When people do not move their stomachs become tense and their nutrition becomes abnormal. When the earth's department in the body fails and the stomach ceases to function many other illnesses arise. To attain cultivation according to Elder Earth's method is more difficult than all other areas. Thus it is said, "It is difficult to live in the middle of the earth." The earth collects the essence of the five directions just like "flesh" covers the entire body. The essence of one's vital organs is also found within flesh thus those people of middle earth have the most prosperous spirits. Those who attain cultivation will feel as if they have taken off "leather shoes" and gone barefoot. They will be aware of the ground when they walk, their original nature will be restored, and they will attain the Way.

Mr. Yang: What is this?

Lord Zhong Hua: The Way has descended to middle earth. Because the people of middle earth are pure, sincere, and rich in moral teachings, they also overcome misery and endure hardship, diligently striving for self-improvement, and are not greedy for extravagances while marked with a heavenly heart. Therefore, since ancient times they have been a unique and wonderful people all stemming from the center of the earth. In

order to ensure that mortals will understand Elder Earth's spirit, I am willing to bestow upon you this charm. It must be read from the morning to the evening to pass to the gods:

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

Ji Gong: We are grateful for Lord Zhong Hua's magnanimous mercy. Your assistance has been great and we must bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful to Lord Zhong Hua for revealing your miraculous Way. Because our time is short I must bid you farewell and follow my teacher back to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
June 21, 1980

24th Journey: Return to and listen at the Zhong Hua Palace... Teachings of Holy Lord Zhong Hua

Poem: *An umbrella of fire tall and wide causes one to perspire and moistens one's clothes. One desires to be cool with a crisp breeze and bamboo fan. The market is hot and one thousand gold coins are spent. It is not as if monks transform into swallows and fly.*

Ji Gong: This burning hot summer lacks rain and dew. People feel faint and parched. The land is also very thirsty and opens its mouth, longing to be moistened by rain. People live on the land and when they have accumulated the water of virtue it moistens like a sweet dew and washes clean all dirt. This reveals a fresh appearance and causes one to live a happy life of glory while avoiding a dry life and withered *qi*. Today I will again guide Mr. Yang to view the Zhong Hua Palace, pay his respects to Lord Zhong Hua, and ask him to reveal his miraculous Way. Prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform!

Mr. Yang: I am already sitting aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived. Let us proceed forward to pay our respects to Lord Zhong Hua and respectfully listen to his teachings!

Mr. Yang: I have had some excellent opportunities to hear the teachings of the lofty sages and I know that my fortune in the Way is not shallow. I am grateful to you for your guidance.

Ji Gong: These are my orders from heaven which I must complete. It is with your teacher that you must share this responsibility to save all sentient beings. I also feel that to help you save these beings is my honor! Today we are fortunate to have this opportunity to travel through the three realms. In reality, it was arranged by heaven. We will endure all hardships to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and fulfill our responsibility to save all sentient beings. Until our task is complete we must apply the whip!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for my master's compassionate direction and your student honors you. The lofty sages within this heaven of the Five Elders are each solemn and their *qi* is extraordinary. I believe that in their past lives they have been cut on the grindstone and smelt in the fire to achieve their accomplishments now. Heaven above and earth below are the same. You can certainly not harvest fruit that you have not worked for. ... We have arrived at Lord Zhong Hua's sacred residence and I feel a little hot. Why is this?

Ji Gong: In a moment you can ask Lord Zhong Hua and you will know.

Mr. Yang: Okay. I pay my respects to Lord Zhong Hua. Today, I have arrived again with my teacher at your sacred residence. Please Lord Zhong Hua, enlarge our intelligence and guide us away from confusion. Right now I feel hot and dry. Why is this?

Lord Zhong Hua: The fields within sentient beings' hearts are filled with the raging fires of greed and desire. These fields are not moistened by the sweet dew of dharma and when they occasionally receive rain it is used entirely for oneself and not shared with others. No wonder sentient beings feel a void within their heart, are lonely, hungry, and thirsty. It is difficult to get them to calm down even with air conditioning and ice water. Originally their heart was covered with lush and growing vegetation, yet the burning spark of desire caused this green growth to become dry and withered. This yellow and precious land became black and the earth "deteriorated." This fire quickly spreads and heaven above is aware of this change so you will feel anxious and worried!

Mr. Yang: So it is thus.

Lord Zhong Hua: Today, I will guide you to view the mysteries of Elder Earth's heaven.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Lord Zhong Hua's guidance! ...Lord Zhong Hua leads us to visit all directions and in my heart I am infinitely grateful. We arrive at a location and I see a large field. Its flowers and trees are luxuriant and there are many fruits of all colors. The field is also covered with rice and sugar cane and much like that found within the mortal world. Is there any way that this is the mortal world?

Lord Zhong Hua: The land found within the mortal world is an extension of my spirit. Heaven is within the mortal realm and the mortal realm is similar to heaven. Therefore, in the mortal realm land takes the place of heaven and the ground where those people who adhere to the true Way stand is a Pure Land or paradise. If one is able to expand this plot of pure land it would become a vast heavenly world. Everything you see here is all found within the mortal realm. It currently exists before your eyes and will reveal the limitless secrets of heaven. Those fated who arrive at this scene will become awakened!

1. This field of rice receives enough moisture and fertilization and its weeds are removed. Thus it produces much rice and it is bowing its head to you in respect. If people can learn from this type of spirit they will certainly have an abundant harvest in the Way.

2. Because the land in this sugar cane field is so hard it cannot be irrigated. The sugar cane growing here is stiff and does not taste good. It is also difficult for it to welcome people. If people are similarly firm and unyielding or hot-tempered (lacking the water that causes them to be soft and flexible) they will have no one left that cares for them and leave people feeling that they are “not their flavor.” People were originally seeds within the rotating ball of essence and after they were born and grew up they blossomed and bore the fruit which became their descendants. Otherwise, if they are not able to stand on solid ground or maintain loyalty to their heavenly responsibilities they will not be bestowed with heavenly moisture (original *qi*) or fertilizer (morality). If one travels across the land holding knife and spear and destroying all vegetation or trampling every living thing they have only cut their own life and roots in the Way. In the end it is like “a hero who has no chance of using his might” and the miraculous Way of Elder Earth will not be obtained. It is truly a pity. Actually, people in the mortal realm need only grow three feet to reach the gods and sink their roots three inches to reach the great Way. They should not give up so easily. If one does not place a foot on the path to evil they will attain the Way of the land. If the hand never commits a discourteous act it can be extended to grasp the Way of heaven! It has been said that the path to cultivation is difficult yet one only need ensure that their hand and feet are adhering to the rules and they will attain success. Is this not simple?

Mr. Yang: What Lord Zhong Hua has said is miraculous. If one can extend their hand three feet towards heaven they will grasp the gods and the great Way can be obtained inches beneath the earth. The great Way is truly not far and it is only people who remove themselves from it. Thus it is said, “The Way is above the head; the Way is beneath the feet.” ...Each grain of sand in the plot of land before us is glittering brightly. It is truly a marvelous sight! What type of sand is this?

Lord Zhong Hua: This is golden sand. As the population of the world increases the value of land rises. An inch of land is worth an inch of gold. Thus, one cannot look lightly upon even a small piece of land. It is a “foothold” and without it all living things would fall. One seed scattered on a small piece of land can produce an unlimited amount of fruit, thus it is called a “square inch of precious land.” The center of the human body is earth and it is called Mount Ling (a square inch of precious land). I hope that mortals pursue cultivation and once they have attained success they will blossom, produce fruit, and become a sagely person.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, share with us the realizations of your heart!

Mr. Yang: “The branches of my mind and the flowers of my heart have opened. A face of dew smiles as the Tathagata. The miraculous Way is not far from where you walk. My eyes calmly observe a small child!” Lord Zhong Hua, what do you think of what I have said?

Lord Zhong Hua: “The flowers bloom on the branch. The child falls to one’s feet to be born again. Life is extinguished in uncommon scenery. When the shell is shed, the

true spirit is released.” Miraculous, miraculous. I will again guide you to question those lofty sages who have attained the Way!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Lord Zhong Hua’s guidance! Since arriving here I have seen many who are cultivated traveling to and fro. They appear very pleased and a light emanates from their entire body. There are also some who sit in meditation while controlling their breathing and mental state. Is it alright to disturb them?

Lord Zhong Hua: It is no problem. You should take advantage of this opportunity and ask about their process of cultivation so that you can share it with mortals.

Mr. Yang: If it is thus I will not be polite. This lofty and cultivated sage looks like a farmer. ...May I ask lofty sage, can you share your experiences of cultivation?

Sage who Cherishes Virtue: While sitting in meditation I see the spirit of the mortal realm’s Mr. Yang traveling towards me. Welcome to this location. I am not cultivated in the great Way and the only reason that I have attained my current “status” is because I observed and obeyed the human relationships my entire life. While living on the land, I did not make the “first wrong step” so I arrived here. I lived in a remote village and plowed the earth in order to survive. Because my father worshipped the gods and was a devout Buddhist ever since I was young, he often related tales of cause and effect. From an early age I was influenced by this religious environment and I nourished feelings of compassion. Whenever I was working in the fields and I encountered a frog or other small animal I would employ every effort to protect it and ensure that it could continue living. During the harvest of fruits and vegetables we always gave something to our neighbors and everybody was harmonious. While alive I also learned that you do not spit, defecate, or urinate on the ground, attempt to direct heaven, or curse the earth. I was always extremely respectful to the land where I was born and I never did anything to damage it. I earnestly cultivated the spirit of the earth. I tilled and planted to grow food and allowed the earth to display its *qi*. Sentient beings should nourish and assist each other. I had no idea that because of my actions I had attained the “Way of the earth.” By firmly guarding the human relationships I attained the “Way of people.” The law of people led to the earth and the law of the earth led to heaven. Thus I have attained the “Way of heaven.” When I died I first passed through the courts of the underworld where my case was dismissed. Lord Zhong Hua then guided me to his heaven where I was refined in the Way. I felt extremely honored.

Lord Zhong Hua: When attempting to return to one’s original condition, cultivation does not have to take place deep within the mountains. It can occur each day where you work as you cultivate a humane, compassionate, and virtuous nature. While caring for and assisting others, the spirit within your original body will increase and eventually you will become a sage. While immortals and Buddhas are living they always take it upon themselves to assist other sentient beings. They use whatever environment they are in to refine themselves. Farmers plant according to the seasons

using “local materials” and enjoy great success. Many occupations are now filled with experts who, as long as they are mindfully working, do not violate heaven’s “conscience (refined seeds).” These types of good-hearted people are the “seeds” that heaven will scatter upon the “pure land.” Mortals should not lightly abandon their task.

Ji Gong: We must now depart from the Five Elder’s heaven. We are grateful for Lord Zhong Hua’s mercy in ensuring that Mr. Yang attained so many wonderful principles. Sentient beings can also expand their intelligence by following these teachings. The Three Clarities and Five Elders are the essence of the Great Way and the source of wonderful principles and mysterious meanings. Those sentient beings willing to read this book “Journey to the Halls of Heaven” are very blessed. By reading it they will be able to calm their minds and realize these wonderful principles. These people should not just give it a cursory glance or they will fail to see the fruit hiding behind the flowers!

Lord Zhong Hua: You two have worked hard visiting heaven and authoring this book. I hope that the mortals who read this book will all return to the “halls of heaven” I, Elder Earth, am willing to wait for this!

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lord Zhong Hua for your beneficial guidance. I feel endlessly grateful... I return with my teacher to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
July 7, 1980

25th Journey: Travel to and visit the Eternal Peach Cave at the Mountain of the Nine Immortals...Lofty Immortal of the Vast City

Poem: Human life is like a play up on a stage. When the skill at performance is outstanding both the hands and feet are busy. The audience laughs, claps, and smiles. At the end of the show people let loose a flood of tears.

Ji Gong: The human life is played out on a stage. In the vicissitudes of life – joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness – each person assumes a role. Moreover, their skillful performance causes the audience to stare dumbfounded, applause, and laugh. Once this play is concluded and the people have dispersed those backstage are exhausted, sore, bloodied, and in tears. Nobody knows this but the play is actually too painful to perform. Within each family there are matched a male and female lead with the older and younger members play supporting roles. There is no need for a script as every day they perform the tragedies and comedies of human life. One day you will need a rest and relax with both legs extended. When you no longer have the ability to act in this play your children and grandchildren must lift you up to the stage (within the home) and allow you to act by yourself and “perform (your role) alone.” At that time you are the most famous performer before passing away. Afterwards, the new and elegant (descendants) will arise each flourishing and lively. When they finally understand this performance, your shadow has already disappeared from their minds. If one completely understood this play it would cause them to be extremely sad. I insist that there is no need for you to be sad. From today on there is no need for you to act in these romances, tragedies, and comedies. We will perform with the gods and immortals and in the end each person can become an immortal or Buddha. Would we not then all be happy? Mr. Yang, prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform. Today we will travel to a new location within the halls of heaven. Firmly grasp this excellent opportunity to establish merit and virtue as this excellent performance is still to come!

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! I hope that this performance develops splendidly.

Ji Gong: The performances of the gods and immortals are unspeakably wonderful. These are performances within performances! We will now climb aboard the lotus flower platform and travel on the road to heaven. ...Mr. Yang, what are you feeling now?

Mr. Yang: Sitting on this lotus flower platform my heart is relaxed. That I have this generous fortune and excellent fate is all because of your guidance. Yet I hope that I am not the only one who rides upon this lotus flower platform. I hope that all sentient beings plant a pure lotus flower within their hearts and that they all ride on these personal forms of transportation to the pure, peaceful, and joyful halls of heaven. Thus

they can experience for themselves the large road that we are traveling upon today and the strange and wonderful sights that we are introducing in this travelogue while observing the mysterious scenes in the halls of heaven.

Ji Gong: What you have said is correct. If it was only us, teacher and student, who observed this sacred realm of heaven it would feel too monotonous and lacking in flavor.

Mr. Yang: For that brief moment before we have arrived at this location the scenery is beautiful, the flowers and trees are flourishing, strange stones are aligned, and spirit and *qi* emanate much like fog. We delicately ascend above to a removed and sacred location. In front of us there is a wall with “Eternal Peach Cave at the Mountain of the Nine Immortals” written upon it. I do not know where this location is. Is it somewhere that sages, worthies, and immortals reside?

Ji Gong: This is where the “Lofty Immortal of the Great City” resides. Let us proceed forward to pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: Okay! I walk along a road that seems to be within a ravine. There is a flowing stream, green forests, and it is calm and cool. This is an excellent and sacred location in which to escape the heat! Within the cave everything is made from natural materials. There are stone chairs, stone tables, and a fountain that provides water. On top of the stone tables there are many types of fruit that cannot be found in the mortal world and they cause one to drool with desire. Within the palace sits a lofty sage. Could this be the Lofty Immortal of the Great City?

Ji Gong: Yes, it is! Quickly proceed forward and pay your respects.

Mr. Yang: I am here to pay my respects to the Lofty Immortal of the Great City! Today, I have followed my teacher Ji Gong to this sacred Eternal Peach Cave. Please Lofty Immortal, provide us with your guidance.

Lofty Immortal of the Vast City: My heart is overjoyed that Mr. Yang has come to this location today. First I will give you this eternal peach! There is no need to be polite. Immortal Children, please present Mr. Yang and Ji Gong with some eternal peaches to eat!

Immortal Children: Yes, sir! Ji Gong and Mr. Yang, please eat these! They will dispel the summer heat you were feeling.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Lofty Immortal and Immortal Children, I will go ahead. Wow! The flavor exceeds that of the fruit from Li Mountain. People have said that there are people who live above us and I reply that in the mountains there are mountains. This immortal fruit at the Mountain of the Nine Immortals is certainly extraordinary. The flavor is sweet and the smell is fragrant. Why is this?

Lofty Immortal: The location where this immortal fruit is planted has a sufficient source of clean water, good air, and no dust or insecticides. This fruit grows naturally and is never subjected to storms or the violent heat of the sun. This immortal realm is covered completely with *qi* and thus the fruit that grows within this environment is naturally extraordinary. The most exquisite fruit from the human realm is not grown within busy cities but is most certainly grown within the purest, mountain environment. When humans exist in a pure environment without desire and filth they will never age and will become an extraordinary immortal.

Mr. Yang: What the Lofty Immortal has said is correct. A pure environment is able to ensure that one has no desires or worries. This person's body and mind will be sweet and delicious like this immortal fruit. There is a toad calmly sitting on this table staring at me. Why is this?

Lofty Immortal: Toads are the essence of moonlight and their spirits are too *yin*. This toad is a divine being and inhales this spirit and *qi* to survive. It is my knowledgeable disciple and its skill in the Way is profound. This is Mr. Hong's original spirit and I hope that Mr. Hong enthusiastically represents heaven in this form while striving to save sentient beings. At a later date his name will be listed on the register of heaven.

Ji Gong: The various reincarnations of human beings each have their own origin. Many rare birds and beasts are divine beings. Their spirit and *qi* surpasses that of ordinary people by hundreds of times. Therefore, to be able to become a good match with heaven we must first become a good match on earth. When mortals do not want to discipline their bodies or commit virtuous actions have they not already lost their "personality" and where will they be reincarnated? If a person climbs to "lofty locations" are they truly "descending below"? We have revealed the original source of all sentient beings where every person was born of the spirit and *qi* of this universe. One should treasure this "true spirit" and not allow it to disappear. If one's form changes they have lost this precious human body! Today's visit to the Lofty Immortal will now conclude. We are grateful for the Lofty Immortal's guidance and we bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: My teacher urges me to return to the temple and thus I must bid farewell to the Lofty Immortal. Thank you for the fruit that you bestowed upon us and your teachings.

Lofty Immortal: I will not keep you any longer and I wish you a smooth journey!

Mr. Yang: I am already aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
July 24, 1980

26th Journey: Travel to and Visit the Great City...First Holy Teacher Confucius

Poem: *The revival of culture relies on men of great scholarship. Small alleys and humble residences are not set apart from virtue. Four symmetric sides do not become a sage. When sins have disappeared why must one chant the name Nan Wu aloud?*

Ji Gong: In contemporary times education is widespread. Young children enter kindergarten to begin this process and continue on to elementary school, junior high, high school, college and eventually study abroad. You could say that if one is involved in school for half of their lives only then are they ready to be called a “scholar.” As soon as the characters in books can be read they are being written and their meanings are being investigated. This is only done to “achieve rank and salary” and if these students are asked “what benefit it provides to the people of the world” I am afraid that they will answer “there is none.” The examples set by the early sages and worthies found within these books are lost and are only used within class as the material for tests. If no one follows their example these children will become “students who read in vain.” Furthermore, the more books that are read the more nefarious the mind becomes and one’s skill at violating the law increases. Originally, when reading books one hoped to become more “virtuous and cultivated” but now this has become a way to “become rich and make money.” This causes me much consternation. I hope that mortals will take the *Dao De Jing* as their textbook and not as a “business plan.” The purpose of reading is to enrich one’s knowledge and enhance the quality of human nature. If books degenerate into a “tool to make a living” they will be considered “paper money” and lose their value. If knowledge becomes learning new “methods to commit crimes” this will lead to an “intellectual decadence”! Today, I will lead Mr. Yang to travel to the sacred realm. Mr. Yang, prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We will ride this lotus flower platform through the rushing wind and floating clouds straight to the pure and sacred realm. The filth of the mortal realm is gradually abandoned after death until disappearing completely. ...We have arrived at our destination.

Mr. Yang: The scenery at the location that we have traveled to today is different than that which I have previously seen. There are dressed-up sophisticates everywhere and the atmosphere here is free from filth. Some of these beings are reciting poems and others are leisurely walking about...

Ji Gong: That which you have seen is the sacred realm of scholars. Ahead is the Palace of the Great City. We will proceed forward and pay our respects to the First Holy Teacher Confucius!

Mr. Yang: Okay! I am honored to visit this sacred realm of scholars today. As soon as I see the Apricot Alter from which Confucius taught his students my life is no longer devoid of meaning. On the large palace ahead the words “Palace of the Great City” are written. This location is clean and free from filth. On both sides there are scholars lined up to welcome us. I follow my teacher into the palace. There is an elderly man seated within the temple with scholars sitting beside him. The furnishings in the temple are antique and there are brushes and ink sets neatly arranged and shelves of books that dazzle the eye. The old man seated within the temple is Confucius!

Ji Gong: The one seated in the middle of the palace is the lofty sage Confucius and he is surrounded on both sides by his disciples. Mr. Yang, quickly proceed forward and pay your respects to Confucius!

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! I humbly pay my respects to the First Holy Teacher Confucius and to the sages and worthies present. I implore you to guide your simpleminded visitor!

Confucius: It is fortunate for Confucianism that Mr. Yang has established a phoenix hall and “apricot alter”⁵³⁹ and grasps the sacred pen to author morality books and awaken the world. My spirit in heaven truly feels reassured. Although Confucianism does not carry on conversations about “extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, or spiritual beings,” spiritual beings are virtuous, the universe contains much, and some experience harm and are not stopped. Thus, I am not against talking about such things. Mortals do not know about life, so how can they understand death! I am afraid that mortals give up too easily and do not perform good deeds while alive, only pursuing them after their deaths. Therefore, I will share with my disciples some matters related to ghosts and gods without “saying everything.” The Way of “loyalty and forgiveness” is a teaching of “compassion.” If one practices self-restraint and propriety they are not violating the Way of benevolence. Human nature is joined with heaven. One need not discuss heaven to attain its Way. Matters of life and death can naturally be found within my teachings. Thus I have said, “If one hears of the Way in the morning they can die at dusk without regret.” If people are able to act according to the dictates of their conscience without violating the virtue of human relationships and firmly follow the Five Constants they will then be in harmony with the Great Way. Also, if one commits “good deeds” while alive they will attain a “good location” after death. Thus the saying, “If you live a suitable life, you will find peace in death.” You may then return to the “peaceful and joyful world” referred to by various religions which is the same as the “utopian world” of which I have spoken. Conversely, the scholars of today teach their students to focus on obtaining a diploma and learn how to make a living. This gradually causes people’s quality of character and morals to

⁵³⁹ This “apricot alter” was where Confucius taught his students.

deteriorate and is viewed by others. Thus these people have said, “Too much education causes one to become nefarious. Though some are foolish they are honest.” I hope that mortals read books and in addition to attaining a full and substantial knowledge they will learn the correct methods to deal with people and their affairs and put these principles into practice. Otherwise, one’s knowledge will be used to deceive others and while one may achieve academic accomplishments they will destroy their own path. There are many fraudulent deeds committed in today’s society. Yet as skillfully as these cheats have deceived others they will similarly meet with a skilful retribution.

Mr. Yang: Confucius is certainly the “exemplary teacher of all generations” and you have shown much concern for scholars today. Thus the saying, “Virtue joins heaven and earth, the Way connects the ancient and modern” should receive sufficient praise. Your words are just like the golden rule and I will take them as my maxim. Please tell me First Holy Teacher, how should Confucian disciples enter the path to cultivation and how can they attain success? Today, Confucius and his scholars enjoy an unrestrained and carefree life in this heavenly realm which I admire very much. How can I learn this method?

Confucius: The Confucian scholars of the contemporary world must take a test before they begin their education. They study day and night until their minds are full of articles and characters. Yet the manner in which they treat others is often stiff and awkward thus they are ridiculed by some and called “bookworms.” If a scholar is thus while deep within their studies it is forgivable. Yet once they have left their school and re-entered society they should apply the teachings of the sages and worthies from their books to assist others. They should be “warm, good, respectful, and assist those in need.” They must never commit discourteous acts that involve: sight, hearing, speaking, and action. They should always strive to cultivate their bodies and nurture their spirits. Although they do not leave their homes and become monks to seek the Way they are already following the Way. When they stand incorruptible in society these scholars are repaying their nation. Moreover, when they teach without discrimination they influence all people. This great accomplishment is that of a sage in heaven and their status there is assured. Once they pass away they will attain the realm of virtuous sages and arrive at this carefree location while avoiding the bitter cycle of rebirth.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. To attain cultivation in Confucianism one must always adhere to the “four nots” and avoid “crime.” This is actually no different from Buddhism and the process of refinement in life is very similar!

Ji Gong: If a person is able to avoid the four nots they will become a true gentleman. They are a pure and lofty person among people and are respectfully called “sages or worthies” which are another name for “immortals or Buddhas.” When people assist others on earth their spirits are one with heaven. Therefore, the sages and worthies here today have all “sought after the welfare of common people” on earth!

Mr. Yang: Confucius, can you reveal what life is like in this heavenly realm for the disciples that stand by your side?

Confucius: Yes. Because my disciples can listen to teachings without prejudice their hearts are joined with mine. Because they have followed my teachings it is not by accident that they are able to gather together in this sacred realm. I have four assistants and ten philosophers, seventy-two worthies, three thousand disciples, and countless students. Those people who follow my teachings are all able to return to heaven and gather here with me. Confucians do not need to practice any religious rituals or have superstitious feelings. If they can deeply commit themselves to my Way, have an upright heart and cultivated body, practice self-restraint and propriety, and share these teachings with others their spirits will naturally ascend from the mortal world and attain this sacred realm. If those who do return are not able to endure small alleys, humble residences, and meager food they will not be happy here. Of contemporary people, who are able to endure this type of pure lifestyle, maintain the true colors of a Confucian, and become a true gentleman? Who is able to view wealth as a floating cloud? My disciples on earth who are wealthy cannot spend their riches excessively but must maintain a lowly demeanor. Thus, although there is no taboo against religion you could say that we are as cautious as one treading on thin ice. If one maintains this demeanor while alive, after death they will naturally be free from the hobbles of the mortal world and they will attain the Way while becoming a sage or worthy.

Mr. Yang: Sages and worthies in ancient times followed this method cultivation but what of those in contemporary times?

Confucius: There are many contemporary sages and worthies within this sacred realm such as the Confucian scholars outside of this palace. Many were contemporary teachers who served as examples for others and taught well their entire lives. They compassionately led their students without greed and though their bodies were cold and tired their hearts remained pure. These teachers worked day and night and had many students. They dispersed the fragrant teachings of the apricot alter and when these teachers grew old and died they were all able to return to this carefree heavenly realm. Therefore, I hope that those who teach others will be worthy examples by not only cultivating their bodies and spirits but while teaching they will sufficiently prepare and earnestly teach. Thus they will avoid taking a salary for misleading youth or causing them to attend additional classes. If one does not teach earnestly they are deficient in their duty and their spirit will be harmed. The future of these people is inconceivable. This location has many peach and plum trees and the results of the teachers here can be readily seen. Earnest teaching produces spirits of high quality and the peach and plum orchards are full and fragrant. If this was not so, the leaves from these trees would fall and there would be no fruit. Although in the eyes of many contemporary people this discussion was nonsensical, on behalf of my own conscience to share these teachings is my responsibility!

Ji Gong: I hope that all teachers on earth are the reincarnation of sages and worthies and are the models for all generations. This salutary influence of education will assist all grateful scholars and there will no longer be “mislead youth” due to “ordinary teachers”! Because our time is short we must bid Confucius farewell.

Confucius: Since you cannot stay any longer my wish is that the virtues of Confucianism increase in magnificence!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the golden words of Confucius. ...I am already aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
August 9, 1980

27th Journey: Travel to and visit the Western Heaven's Precious Palace of Heroes...Sakyamuni Buddha

Poem: There is not one word of Buddhist doctrine that did not come from the west. All relies on the mind's intention to use this skill. The true eye of the dharma⁵⁴⁰ is gained through a thorough understanding of Buddhist doctrine. The Sea of Bitterness and vessel of mercy are transformed into foolishness.

Ji Gong: Buddhist doctrine came from the west and has saved many stubborn and foolish sentient beings. It has been added to by the honest and simple nature of the Chinese people and without prior consultation, Buddhist teachings and Chinese culture hold many of the same views. Thus the people of China were able to accept a foreign religion which was melded with their own beliefs and grew to become the center of vitality and belief for the people of the world. Today there are many beings who cultivate themselves according to Buddhist teachings. These people act according to teachings of mercy and work to assist others. There have been many revered Buddhist monks from ancient generations to now. I was also a Buddhist monk. As an arhat I left home and joined my own (small) family and assisted every sentient being (extended family) that was fated to be saved. You could say that it was for all sentient beings that I left home. Some Buddhists who become clergy enter a temple to be alone. These people come from their extended family (society) and enter a smaller family (temple). From birth to death they are "lonely monks" who will never become "buddhas who serve all beings as family." It is truly pitiful. Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to the Western Heaven where we will pay our respects to Sakyamuni Buddha and hear his teachings.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: The "Precious Palace of Heroes" has already appeared before us. Let us proceed forward and pay our respects to Sakyamuni Buddha.

Mr. Yang: The Precious Palace of Heroes looks like a large temple in the mortal world. There are many Buddhist monks and nuns clothed in robes coming and going. Within these monks and nuns there are also young Buddhist priests who bow to us.

Ji Gong: This is Buddhism's Western Paradise, a realm that is pure and calm.

Mr. Yang: All about us there are sparkling gems and jade stones. The atmosphere here is calm and I can smell sandalwood incense... Sakyamuni is seated in the center of the palace. He looks solemn and a light emits from his entire body. On either side

⁵⁴⁰ 正法眼藏 is one of the eight principles of the Chan School of Buddhism.

stand two protectors of the Dharma⁵⁴¹ whose imposing nature causes one to not dare approach. I have come to pay my respects to Sakyamuni. I have followed my teacher here today to this precious temple. My heart is infinitely happy and I ask Sakyamuni to reveal the teachings of Buddhism.

Sakyamuni Buddha: Mr. Yang, there is no need to be so polite. Buddhist teachings traveled to the East and saved those who were fated. Buddhism did not decline as it passed through successive dynasties and many Buddhist disciples sacrificed themselves to protect these teachings and ensure that they endured. Now, at the end of the three periods⁵⁴² all Buddhist teachings are spread throughout the world. The number of people who study and cultivate themselves according to Buddhist teachings increases daily which indicates that Buddhism can benefit all sentient beings. Those who join Buddhism must be steadfast in protecting themselves against its prohibitions while cultivating a bright mind that sees the true nature of reality. These people will then achieve results and rank. Mr. Yang, you serve as a messenger for the phoenix halls who has also sincerely cultivated himself according to the precious and virtuous knowledge of Buddhist teachings. This phoenix hall spreads the truth of the sages and worthies to all and truly symbolizes the aim of Buddhism, “To abstain from all evil and always act virtuously.” This could be called the true teaching of the last period. The Tathagata is present at this phoenix hall and engaged in saving sentient beings by opening more convenient doors to this doctrine. People will attain immeasurable amounts of merit when they cultivate themselves according to these teachings.

Mr. Yang: What Sakyamuni has said is correct. According to that which this disciple knows, devotees of Buddhism on earth often slander and defame the teachings of phoenix halls. They regard the phoenix halls as teachers of heterodoxy who harm people. What does Sakyamuni think about this?

Sakyamuni Buddha: Because this is the last period of Buddhism, many have already separated from the Buddha and his teachings. Although sentient beings in this last period have “virtuous roots” they lack “roots of intelligence.” Thus, those who cultivate themselves according to Buddhism cannot read other scriptures or take part in objective discussions and research. They focus solely on Buddhism (often a particular branch) and other subjects (and their scriptures) are not deemed to be worthy of any consideration. This creates a subjective and prejudiced opinion and they are unable to call other religions “friendly religions.” They slander others and label them “evil or heterodoxy.” From the mouth of Buddhism spurts blood and its hands are used to kill. This truly causes me much pain! Buddhism has 84,000 different methods of teaching and phoenix halls respectfully revere the ancient sages and worthies, immortals and Buddhas. Their teachings are in agreement with those of Buddhism, where adherents purify their minds, guard against prohibitions, and peacefully recite scriptures and charms. These adherents sincerely pray that the sacred

⁵⁴¹ Also called Skanda Bodhisattvas.

⁵⁴² The three Buddhist periods are Zheng, Xiang, and Wei, the last of which is characterized by the degeneration and extinction of Buddhist teachings.

spirit from the heavenly realm will descend. The sincerity and purity of this fragrant cloud is felt by the Buddha and bodhisattvas who descend to share their teachings in direction of those fated and to save them from the wrong path. If virtuous men and virtuous women guard themselves against the five prohibitions, energetically practice the ten virtues, and whole-heartedly pray to the Buddha he must come. Thus, with the attainment of the Buddha's strength this phoenix hall composes books of divination and flowers bloom from its miraculous writings. These teachings save sentient beings and are reasonable actions. I wish that Buddhist disciples would not persecute these "other Buddhists." This actually causes their own roots of intelligence to perish. Fate is concealed from the eyes of sentient beings who can only read scriptures and hear others speak. Thus these beings speak ill of others. A ray of light can move the spirit to author a book. In my view, if one truly feels they would like to communicate they can pray to the Buddha and he will arrive. If one does not believe this, then why is the fact that Buddhist disciples chant scriptures from day until night not considered demonical heterodoxy!

Mr. Yang: Sakyamuni is well-named as "World Honored." Your teachings allow "mortals to be respectful" and you are truly "honorable." Each type of religion needs only not violate virtuous customs to benefit the hearts of mortals and be called a true religion. The Buddha venerated the world, cherished compassion, and taught equality. He regarded all living things impartially as all sentient beings that exist in the three realms possess a Buddha-nature and Buddha-body.⁵⁴³ If one looks down on the rest of humanity and calls themselves a "student of Buddhism" they are actually in "violation of Buddhism." What does Sakyamuni think of this?

Sakyamuni Buddha: Buddhist teachings encompass everything. Thus it is said, "The teachings of Buddha are limitless." "Outside teachings" are like the robes that clothe a Buddhist monk. When those who are cultivated wear these robes they can protect their Buddha-body. How can these robes be abandoned or destroyed? The sentient beings of this world all have the heavenly responsibility to nurture their lives in the Buddha. How could they then trample on others? Those who discriminate against others religions and people have not yet extinguished the selfishness, jealousy, and anger within their hearts. If the mouth of the Buddha spits gunpowder, how many people would be killed or wounded? This is no different than a butcher. The flowers and fruits that are offered to the Buddha are planted "externally" by hard-working sentient beings and are picked "externally" by other people's hands. Would they be abandoned by the Buddha? They actually touch the Buddha and cause his merciful heart to swell! Who provides Buddhist monks and nuns with "food, clothing, and shelter"? Who makes these things? I hope that Buddhist monks and nuns quickly lay down their butcher knives and stop slaughtering their virtuous and fine friends. Thus they will avoid falling into the netherworld to receive bitter retribution.

⁵⁴³ This Buddha-nature is the potential for enlightenment and the Buddha-body is the Trikāya, or three-fold embodiment of the Buddha.

Mr. Yang: The merit of Sakyamuni is limitless, you are one with the Buddha and you are completely equanimous. While saving all beings and spreading all teachings you are without bias. You truly understand that which sentient beings need and I kneel again before you!

Sakyamuni Buddha: I have the true eye of the dharma focused on earth below and it is never extinguished. Those who attain it will achieve the road to Buddhahood.

Mr. Yang: Is this the “miraculous heart of Nirvana”?

Sakyamuni Buddha: Yes! True form and false form are present together.

Mr. Yang: Before me I see it (Buddha) but when I look behind me it is gone!

Sakyamuni Buddha: When living in the land of buddhas, Buddha is everywhere. When one leaves the land of buddhas, one becomes a buddha. If you cannot see him just look at your reflection in a mirror and you will. To truly know that your own self and the Buddha are the same causes one’s heart to shine and if you do not depart from this type of thinking you will naturally become a buddha.

Mr. Yang: Okay. I have seen a red dot on the forehead of the Buddha. What does this mean?

Sakyamuni Buddha: This is something that he has had since birth and after death it remained with him. It comes and it goes and it does not open or shut. It is his “Buddha eye.” Its vision is not biased and is always just. It is the lamp on top of Mount Ling from which one can see their own nature and how to enter the realm of the Buddha. Thus it is called the true eye of the dharma and is inexpressibly miraculous.

Ji Gong: This eye can see through 3,000 universes. It can be as large as Mount Xu Mi or as small as a grain of millet. Thus it is said, “When let out it is enormous, when rolled up it can be hidden.”

Mr. Yang: Why do monks mark the tops of their head?

Sakyamuni Buddha: These scars are created by burning incense and encourage one’s Buddha-nature to emerge. These marks on monks and nuns are like blossoms on the tops of their heads. This is called the “Buddha-head” and it leads to a “circle of light” which creates the “fruit of pāramitā.”⁵⁴⁴ If those who accept these marks violate the true Way their marks will not sprout the seeds of a bodhisattva but instead grow long roots of evil and become a “ghost-head.” If this happens, it will naturally become difficult for that monk or nun to near the Buddha’s Western Paradise.

⁵⁴⁴ This fruit is thought to be the ability to move from the cycle of life and death to the realm of nirvana.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. It is inconceivable that every word and deed of the Buddha's miraculous life needs to be followed. Sakyamuni, can you instruct contemporary students of Buddhism how to achieve success?

Sakyamuni Buddha: If you would like to become a true Buddhist disciple you must follow the methods of cultivation listed below:

1. Belief: Believe that the Buddha is true, believe that you are not (or will not commit) that which is false, believe others are no different. If you wholeheartedly follow these three beliefs you will be saved and become a buddha.

2. Emancipation: Emancipate yourself through the enlightenment of Buddhist teachings. Do not become hindered by the written word. If one understands the scriptures they will be emancipated. If one only attempts emancipation through the scriptures and does not attempt to emancipate their own heart it is as if something precious has been ensnared in a cage. Although the body is precious it is actually a prisoner. How then is one to attain emancipation and become a buddha? If one emancipates themselves from the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness the body and mind will become pure and one will enter the land of the Buddha.

3. Conduct: If one believes and is emancipated it is nothing without proper conduct. To attain cultivation requires noble conduct. Thus the process is called "cultivation and conduct." Those with proper conduct keep aloof from worldly affairs. "Those who act alone are following the lesser Way; those who pursue cultivation with others are said to be part of the great Way." Thus one can either act by themselves or act with others for the salvation of sentient beings. If one follows the teachings of mercy they will not only think about themselves.

4. Certification: Buddhism has 84,000 different methods. Those with sincere and upright hearts can attain cultivation in any one of these methods. Each method of cultivation has its own method of examination and certification. Chan monks and secular Buddhist devotees can attain cultivation through certification. What they teach or are taught should be followed and each method of cultivation should be certified. There should never be any discrepancy between what they learn and how they act as any anger or blame will destroy one's heart, burn one's nature and merit, and extinguish the roots of intelligence. It is like the tree that falls on a "pedestrian." Its leaves and fruit will fall because it desires to harm people but it must then be cut back and harmed itself. Thus the saying, "If you lift up fire to burn heaven you will only burn yourself." The four points above are the foundation of cultivation and when you follow the three pure tasks below (tasks of the body, mouth, and desire) you will understand the principle of cause and effect in the three realms:

Remaining teachings omitted due to redundancy.

Mr. Yang: Sakyamuni's explanation of Buddhist doctrine will emancipate and direct those pursuing cultivation. I have been benefited much and I thank you for that.

Sakyamuni Buddha: If mortals are able to obey my teachings of cultivation they will surely become buddhas.

Ji Gong: Because our time is short the teachings must conclude here. We bid farewell to Sakyamuni Buddha.

Sakyamuni Buddha: Okay! I hope that Buddhist teachings continue to spread across the world and that all sentient beings receive this dharma rain which will expel misery and assist them to attain happiness.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
August 19, 1980

28th Journey: Travel to and Listen at the Southern Sea's Mount Pu To...Teachings of Buddha Guanyin

Poem: *Within purple bamboo groves a carefree life can be observed. Sitting aboard the white lotus Guanyin can be seen. Mount Pu To is not far from the heart and mind. The bodhisattva heart is sought within the intestines.*

Ji Gong: There are many people on earth who worship the bodhisattva Guanyin. Because Guanyin's law of mercy leaves people with a friendly and intimate feeling she is like the "old mother" within the home. Thus she is lauded with the name "Every home's Guanyin." She is also called "Old Mother Guanyin" and those that worship Guanyin are also worshipping the Golden Mother. The bodhisattva Guanyin is a reincarnation of the ancient Buddha and had achieved Buddhahood some time ago. Thus the names, "The Tathagata of the Bright and True Dharma," "Ancient Buddha Guanyin," and "Ancient Buddha of the South Sea." He hears and assists the miserable and distressed and there is nowhere that his presence cannot enter which motivates many people to respect and worship him. Would mortals like to become as cultivated as Guanyin? Just follow the "Bodhisattva Way"! Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to visit the bodhisattva Guanyin at the Southern Sea's Mount Pu To. There we will ask for instruction. In former times, the bodhisattva Guanyin achieved the Way within the purple bamboo groves of the Southern Sea's Mount Pu To. The location that we will travel to today is within the Western Heaven.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: ... We have already arrived at the Southern Sea. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: Why is there a large sea before us and how will we be ferried across?

Ji Gong: I do not know. This lotus flower was grown in fresh water and I am afraid that if it is immersed in the water of this "Sea of Bitterness" it will dry out and wither. I do not know what to do.

Mr. Yang: Should we try to walk across the water and see if we sink?

Ji Gong: Yes! I will try first. Wait here for a moment!

Mr. Yang: My merciful teacher puts both feet on the water and through his mysterious powers he is like a boat and does not sink!

Ji Gong: Did you see how I am doing? My feet are multi-purpose. They travel through land, sea, and air. Mr. Yang, try it out!

Mr. Yang: My skill in the Way is not sufficient. I do not dare try as I am afraid that I will sink within the sea!

Ji Gong: You will not be harmed as I am right here to rescue you!

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. I will give it a try...Oh, no! There is no way. I began to sink and my teacher had to quickly rescue me!

Ji Gong: Do not be frightened. I will pull you back onto the shore.

Mr. Yang: Luckily you rescued me. Otherwise I am afraid I would have already sunk to the bottom of the sea where I would be a snack for the fishes.

Ji Gong: There is no need to be afraid!

Mr. Yang: Teacher, why do your feet not sink below the water like mine do? Can you reveal this secret?

Ji Gong: If you would like to know I will tell you. When you watch people who cannot swim they do not sink when swimming in a pool because they bring a life jacket. This life jacket is filled with air so they are able to float. Once you know this principle, when you step out onto the water you should concentrate on being like a balloon. Your body will be filled with nothing and you will naturally float up into the air. If you do not believe this just look at a bamboo tube, balloon, or iron bucket. As long as the center is airtight (just as one holds on to what is original and does not waver) it will not sink.

Mr. Yang: What you have said makes sense. I now understand!

Ji Gong: This is also representative of people's lives on earth. One cannot seek after and grasp too tightly to material objects and forms or they will quickly sink back into the six stages of reincarnation. If one is able to let go of everything and is not bound by the material things, emotions, loves, and desires of the mortal world, the body will be filled with a "vast and true *qi*." This type of body will be like a balloon and will not be dragged down by material things. It will naturally float up to the halls of heaven. Today, I am completely filled with air and water has no chance of entering my body. Therefore, I am in no danger of being drowned. If people can become completely pure they will regard water (and material things) as floating clouds. They will pass through water as if it is a cloud, escape from the Sea of Bitterness, and escape further rebirths.

Mr. Yang: Ahead there is a vessel that looks like a sail boat. Whose is it?

Ji Gong: Ha, ha! Guanyin has already sailed here because he knew that we would try this method to cross the sea. Thus, he has come to welcome us!

Mr. Yang: The small boat approaches the shore and inside it stands the bodhisattva Guanyin floating and clothed in white. Guanyin appears solemn but merciful and looks exactly as I imagined or have seen within my dreams. Today, I am very fortunate and I pay my respects to the bodhisattva Guanyin.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: Mr. Yang, there is no need to be so polite! I was within the purple bamboo grove on Mount Pu To when I heard you two say that you were coming here. My eyes of intelligence and wisdom knew that you would attempt to cross the water using this method so I brought my boat to ferry you across. Please, both climb aboard!

Mr. Yang: Okay! Why is this vessel of mercy so small?

Bodhisattva Guanyin: I am only ferrying across you two. If the boat was too big it would be inconvenient. If there are more passengers this boat will automatically expand to accommodate them.⁵⁴⁵ Commonly, those who have cultivated their bodies and studied the Way – so long as their heart is not reticent and they truly desire to live leisurely in this land of buddhas – only need shout my nickname “Guanyin” and I will appear by their side. Thus this vessel of mercy can limitlessly expand and save all sentient beings under heaven.

Mr. Yang: Guanyin is very merciful. Sentient beings are very fortunate they have your limitless teachings.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: I am about to set sail. Mr. Yang, you must firmly grab one of the ship’s beams because it is as fast as flying. If even one hand lets go you may fall into the sea below which would be very dangerous.

Mr. Yang: Okay! I am ready, please set sail! ... Why doesn’t this boat have a motor and how is Guanyin mysteriously able to sail it as fast as one flies?

Ji Gong: This is not a steamboat from the mortal realm so it does not use a motor to propel itself forward. All that it needs to move is for Guanyin to give the command. This type of motor is “within the heart” of Guanyin. As soon as the heart wills it forward the boat begins to move. Therefore, it is called the “dharma vessel.”

Mr. Yang: This is truly too wonderful, when the heart moves the boat moves; when the heart stops the boat stops. This bodhisattva pilots the vessel of mercy and it is not the vessel of mercy that pilots the bodhisattva. The will and strength of Guanyin is

⁵⁴⁵ A similar bottomless ferry is featured in chapter ninety-eight of *Journey to the West*.

inexhaustible. Thus this vessel can appear beside anyone who calls for salvation from misery and distress.

Ji Gong: We have arrived at Western Heaven's Mount Pu To. Today we will travel around and hear Guanyin speak.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: Sentient beings have been confused by the seven emotions and six desires. If one's body falls into the Sea of Bitterness it will undergo suffering and you are the only one to blame. Today, the gates to virtue have been opened wide and the Buddha has descended to this paradise from Western Heaven to save all fated sentient beings. Ji Gong and Mr. Yang have arrived today to travel about and view this realm. Please follow me!

Mr. Yang: There is a thick and lush bamboo grove, the air is fresh, and there is running water off to one side. This is truly a sacred and wonderful land.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: The sweet dew of the purple bamboo grove flows into the Sea of Bitterness and diminishes the suffering of sentient beings. It is also the "dharma water" that saves sentient beings.

Mr. Yang: Ahead there is a large lotus pond full of beautiful white lotus flowers. Next to the pond there is a towering and lush bamboo grove that forms a natural grotto. Inside there are two children. Who are they?

Bodhisattva Guanyin: These are a virtuous boy and good girl. I reside within this purple bamboo grove and sit on these white lotus flowers. It is pure and tranquil without measure. Yet my heart is with those sentient beings who have not yet been saved. Thus, I often descend to the mortal world to save these sentient beings who call out my name. If they are in distress I will appear to offer them assistance. I sincerely hope that sentient beings commit more benevolent and just actions. Then these beings will serve as incarnations of me who can assist others at any time and any place. Because these beings are in harmony with my bodhisattva heart my mind and spirit will surely be interlinked with theirs. At a later date, these people will surely be saved and taken to reside with me in the purple bamboo grove. Those people who wish to cultivate themselves according to the bodhisattva Way must be completely unbiased. They will then achieve the true fruits. I am sitting on my lotus flower throne!

Mr. Yang: Guanyin's body all of a sudden floats above the lotus flower throne and looks like a female immortal that has leisurely left all filth behind...

Ji Gong: Guanyin, can you describe why you sit like that?

Bodhisattva Guanyin: Okay! "I sit in the purple bamboo grove floating above the white lotus. Guanyin calmly views the reflection of heaven in the water. Virtuous boys

and good girls stand on both sides. Sweet due and willow branches spread everywhere.” Does this poem make sense?

Ji Gong: It is very good! Mr. Yang, you have come this far today. You should ask for more instruction concerning Buddhist doctrine!

Mr. Yang: Okay! Our meeting today is very fortunate. I would like to hear more about bodhisattva Guanyin’s teachings of mercy.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: Yes! The contemporary world today has already attained much enjoyment from its material progress. When regarded by those in this sacred realm they believe that mortals are fortunate and all Buddhas praise this good fortune. Yet those mortals who enjoy a larger piece of this fortune all fall into the trap of “wine, women, wealth, and rage.” These four great evils create an abyss, thus those that “spend their fortunes” in excessive enjoyment with no control will commit evil actions and fall into the consequences of sin. These beings will, at last, reap their “retribution for evil.” It is unfortunate that sentient beings will arrive at this state and it causes me to feel very sad! Fortunately, the phoenix halls now clarify teachings and help to maintain the morality of people. It does this by urging them to follow the three principles and five constants, cultivate themselves in the five human relationships and eight virtues, and by improving society’s bad customs. These phoenix halls encourage what is pure and eliminate what is impure while serving as a brightly burning lamp on a dark road. I often descend to the various halls and direct the spirit-writer to share teachings that save sentient beings, exhort them to truly believe in Buddhist doctrine, and to avoid the five prohibitions. Those who study the Way and cultivate themselves in Buddhism while maintaining a bright heart and nature will certainly attain the fruits of Buddhism. Today, Mr. Yang has come to this location and I am infinitely joyful. I would now like to guide you to visit those bodhisattvas who have attained cultivation and achieved the fruit of bodhisattvas.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Guanyin’s guidance.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: Follow me!

Mr. Yang: Guanyin floats as lightly as a cloud and in an instant has left the lotus flower throne to travel about like a floating cloud or running water... Oh! Along the road the mountains and water is stunning. It truly is a realm of immortals. We arrive and in front of us there are many mediation halls. There are monks meditating beneath some bodhi trees while others are practicing Chan meditation. They look very absorbed.

Bodhisattva Guanyin: While on earth all of these bodhisattvas cultivated themselves in the “Bodhisattva Way.” After they achieved the Way they came to this tranquil realm to pursue further cultivation. It does not matter if one is Buddhist clergy or laity,

they only need to study my spirit and cultivate themselves while saving sentient beings to ensure their own success. Mr. Yang, you can ask them questions!

Mr. Yang: Okay! Bodhisattva, (he is a Buddhist monk clothed in robes whose face looks merciful and kind, he has a bald head which emits light, and the marks on his head emit an even more intense light) how did you attain cultivation and these fruits of the Way?

Bodhisattva Light of Wisdom: My dharma name is Light of Wisdom. While alive I joined the Buddhist priesthood, revered the three treasures, was respectful of Sakyamuni, and followed the Bodhisattva Way. I felt that the most important part of cultivating myself according to Buddhist teachings and following the Way was to assist other people of the world. When I joined the Buddhist clergy I did not dry up within the temple but attempted to learn all that I could from the experiences of others. Thus, while pursuing cultivation I shared the scriptures with others, assisted animals, helped the poor, provided relief to those who were disaster stricken, and other works of compassion. I performed all of these actions with the utmost effort while cultivating my inner feelings through sitting in Chan meditation. I was very respectful of Bodhisattva Guanyin and if any of my fellow monks had an illness or pain I wholeheartedly assisted them to overcome their difficulty. This enabled them to feel the merciful spirit of Buddhism and lead a more pious life. On the path to cultivation I also underwent innumerable sicknesses, trials, and adverse circumstances. Yet throughout these trials I was aware that I must take advantage of these “hardships.” While in pain I would stay focused and resolutely endure to act virtuously and cultivate myself in the Way my entire life, to spread Buddhist teachings, and influence many sentient beings. In the end, I would achieve the position of a bodhisattva. During this time I respectfully listened to the teachings of Sakyamuni and Guanyin and again cultivated myself while attaining an even higher rank. I hope that mortals will pursue cultivation while being unselfish and embracing the bodhisattva heart and assisting others. When you give compassionately your feelings will become those of a bodhisattva and after some time these hearts will become one and you will become free to achieve the fruits of a bodhisattva.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Bodhisattva Light of Wisdom’s teachings. If one uses the emotion of “great compassion” to assist others, they will attain results of “great happiness.” The principle of cause and effect never commits even the smallest error. I will inquire after another bodhisattva (she is a lay person yet the light of Buddha emits from her head, she is noble, and her *qi* is extraordinary). How did you attain cultivation and these fruits of the Way?

Bodhisattva Comprehension of Compassion: I achieved cultivation at home. Because my husband worked for the government, after my children were grown and had begun their own careers, I was bored. One of my female friends introduced me to a Buddhist temple and I vowed to revere the three treasures. I became a lay nun and diligently studied Buddhist scripture, became a vegetarian, and prayed to the Buddha.

As I meditated my wisdom was expanded and I became aware that in this human life only one's Buddha-nature is real. Thus I often donated money for the printing of scriptures and assisted the poor with the utmost effort. Because my younger brother opened a drug store, I told him to distribute medication for free and I paid the bill. The good deeds from my life could not be counted. I constantly accumulated merit and diligently cultivated my heart and mind. I committed no evil actions and finally achieved the fruit of the bodhisattva.

Mr. Yang: When pursuing the bodhisattva path at home it is easier to be close to other sentient beings. If you try your best to display the essence of a bodhisattva by assisting those who are miserable you will achieve success and be worthy of praise! I will ask another bodhisattva (who is wearing simple, gray clothes, is completely bald, and truly appears blessed). How did you attain cultivation and these fruits of the Way?

Bodhisattva of Virtue and Benevolence: I pursued cultivation at home. I accepted an invitation from a friend to study the Way with his teacher and after his instruction I understood the truth of human existence. I attempted to save sentient beings and cultivated myself according to Confucian principles which I discovered contained the same wonderful truths as Buddhism. Thus I had no prejudices against Confucian teachings, the *Dao De Jing*, the *Canon of Purity and Tranquility*, the Four Books, and the Five Classics. Therefore, I often discussed cultivation with Daoists and studied methods of cultivation from all books. I had already refined my internal and external merits, joyfully pursued the Way my entire life, assisted many sentient beings to perform virtuous actions, and helped the poor with all of my effort. Thus I attained this rank of bodhisattva.

Mr. Yang: Listening to these bodhisattvas speak I feel that these matters of cultivation are extremely important. It does not matter to what religious organization you belong. That you assist others is work that must be done. If you do not have this type of spirit that assists others and do not reveal a merciful heart you will not have the qualifications to become a bodhisattva. One who is not willing to help others is a stingy and selfish "miser" whose "kind feelings" are not sufficient. They care only about their own needs and will never attain residency in this infinite realm. Thus, their achievements will always be limited!

Ji Gong: What Mr. Yang has said is correct. I hope that all mortals will be kindhearted. Only then will they not become cancerous, rotten, and "never satisfied." Today we will conclude here and bid farewell to Guanyin!

Bodhisattva Guanyin: Time is short so I will accompany you back to the temple. You are welcome to come again!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for Bodhisattva Guanyin's mercy in saving sentient beings. We bid you farewell. I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
September 5, 1980

29th Journey: Travel to and listen at the Land of Western Paradise...Teachings of Amitabha Buddha

Poem: No filth can descend upon a light and pure body. Every inch of the Pure Land is diligently cultivated. When one's achievements and merit is full they can return to paradise. The sea that surrounds heaven takes all of one's strength to swim.

Ji Gong: Everywhere you can hear those studying Buddhist teachings or cultivating themselves according to the Way asking, "How should one study Buddhist teachings or cultivate themselves according to the Way?" According to me, this is not a big deal as all one has to do is "ask your heart, ask your heart!" If the heart is "without qualms" I believe that you are not far from the Buddha. If one departs from their heart there is no Buddha to be found. This is like a temple that is completely empty inside and can no longer be called a temple. If people have no heart how can they be called a person? Therefore, I hope that sentient beings will be "people of heart." Hearts are malleable and as an expert seamstress may make many different types of clothes, people's hearts as "skilled workers" can be different than someone's personal appearance may reveal. If one wants to become a "buddha" or a "demon" you need only follow the desires of your heart. Each person is a "magician" and if you want to be a certain way you need only take those steps and act that way to change. I hope that you will all become good people, immortals, and buddhas. I hope that you do not become demons or ghosts and cause people to fear and loathe you. If this happens you were too foolish. Whether you become good or evil is up to you. At that time it will be up to you if you have become a ghost in hell or a chicken, duck, cow, or dog. With one glance in a mirror you will be frightened and not know how you changed into this "form." At that time you can only blame yourself so do not make the wrong decision! Listen to what I have to say! If your original appearance begins to change, please quickly change it back. If you do not, once you have become the "finished product" you will be regretful but left with no time to change. Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to travel through the Land of Western Paradise and pay his respects to Amitabha Buddha.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: ...We have already arrived. Mr. Yang, quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: Oh! Arriving at this location there are gold, silver, and precious stones spread everywhere. They are neatly arranged on fences, within the forest, and caught within nets. Each is extraordinary and sparkling. This is something that cannot be seen in the mortal realm!

Ji Gong: The Land of Western Paradise is where Amitabha Buddha resides. This is the “Land of Paradise, Seven Fences of Gems, Seven Nets of Gems, and Seven Avenues of Gem Trees, surrounded by treasure on all sides.” We will proceed forward to pay our respects to Amitabha Buddha and listen to his teachings.

Mr. Yang: Ahead there is a large palace. Is this where Amitabha Buddha resides?

Ji Gong: Yes! Ahead is the “Mi To Palace.” Let us proceed forward and pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! Here there are many lofty monks and lay people who appeared to have attained cultivation. Their faces appear merciful and their mouths appear to be praying to the Buddha. The sound that they make is melodious and tranquil and causes the hearts of those who hear them to feel relaxed and joyful.

Ji Gong: These are all beings who cultivated themselves according to Buddhist teachings while on earth. Because their merit was sufficient they were able to come to this Land of Western Paradise. ... We have already arrived at the sacred palace. Let us enter and pay our respects to Amitabha Buddha.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! Entering the palace I see a solemn buddha seated in the middle. Rays of light emit from his entire body and engenders respect. Your disciple Mr. Yang has come to pay his respects. Today, I have been fated to follow my teacher to this Land of Western Paradise and interview Amitabha Buddha. Please give me your guidance.

Amitabha Buddha: Okay! People chant “Amitabha Buddha” yet I chant “sentient beings are buddhas.” All sentient beings within the cycle of life and death experience pain. Thus, with forty-eight great aspirations I created this paradise and transformed it into the Pure Land. I have taught people that they should whole-heartedly recite the name of a buddha and cultivate themselves in the Way and never forget that I am a buddha. If they do this I must receive them when they arrive here. But if people casually chant the name of buddha, this buddha will disperse and even if they have committed compassionate deeds they will have no strength to cross the divide. Thus I hope that all sentient beings who cultivate themselves according to Buddhist doctrine will rid themselves of any filth and create their own Pure Land. Otherwise, it will be difficult for them to achieve success. Today I am pleased to see that Mr. Yang of the mortal realm has entered this Land of Western Paradise to share my words and view this realm. If you have questions you can ask them all and I will answer you myself.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful to Amitabha Buddha for giving me this opportunity. Buddha, a moment ago you said, “Sentient beings all chant Amitabha Buddha, but you intone that sentient beings are buddhas.” I feel that this is very meaningful. Can you explain what you mean by this?

Amitabha Buddha: Okay! You are truly intelligent. Sentient beings recite Amitabha Buddha day and night hoping that I will save them and bring them to this paradisiacal realm. I chant that sentient beings are buddhas day and night in the hopes that they will become just like me. If they could carry out my intentions the mortal world would become the Pure Land and a land of paradise. I would then also like to travel to the human realm and reside there in a carefree existence!

Mr. Yang: Amitabha Buddha's words contain a wonderful message. If the human realm became paradise you would like to descend and reside there?

Amitabha Buddha: As long as the human realm is the same as this location, I would be willing to descend.

Mr. Yang: Sentient beings all want to ascend to the land of paradise. Is this an inverted way of thinking?

Amitabha Buddha: Because the obstructions of mortals are many they cannot be released from pain and worries. Thus they are hobbled by this misery and would very much like to escape this bitterness and attain joy. I hope that as a Buddha I can ferry them across the divide and take away the misery of those who ask. This is called, "comprehending enlightenment and to return." If one allows misery to become joy and takes fantasy as reality this is then an "inversion."

Mr. Yang: If this is so, how is one able to ensure that the Buddha will lead them from misery?

Amitabha Buddha: One only needs to "chant the name of the Buddha and study Buddhism"!

Mr. Yang: It is that simple?

Amitabha Buddha: "With the words Amitabha Buddha, one conveniently arrives at the land of paradise. One should study the Buddha and become just like him."

Mr. Yang: What Amitabha Buddha has said is wonderful. I hope that you are willing to expound and clarify your meaning!

Amitabha Buddha: To recite the name of Buddha is originally "to chant and not forget" but results in "chanting too much and forgetting." If one chants "Amitabha Buddha" they will eventually chant "my own nature is truly a Buddha." If one (for a long time) chants and achieves buddhahood, they have first chanted on behalf of Buddha for a lengthy period (of refinement) and achieved truth. At a later date, mortals will naturally chant your name as a buddha. If your heart is completely calm and your words are always true your heart will be one with that of Amitabha Buddha. Thus I said, "With the words Amitabha Buddha one conveniently arrives at the land of

paradise.” If one recognizes oneself as a buddha you will understand your heart and nature. As soon as you recite the name of a Buddha, that Buddha will appear before you and you will be walking in the Pure Land. The burdens of sentient beings are weighty and their worries are many. To chant the name of Buddha is to spit out your *qi* of misery and extinguish your bitter burdens. This is one miraculous aspect of chanting the name of a Buddha. Buddhism has prohibitions, rules, and rites. If one can successfully and sincerely study each of these principles they will achieve Nirvana and true awareness.

Mr. Yang: Reciting the name of a Buddha is like spitting out your “*qi* of misery” and reduces your bitter burdens. It is a miraculous, medicinal treatment for the mind and spirit. What do you think about those sentient beings do not yet recite the name of Buddha?

Amitabha Buddha: Those sentient beings who worship and recite the name of the Buddha are emancipated from vulgar thoughts and disturbances of the heart. If one devoutly chants, their Buddha-mind will be revealed and at that time my heart can become interlinked with theirs. If those who reside in the three realms hear my name and are respectful I will save them. Therefore, those that devoutly recite the name of Buddha can avoid disaster, be emancipated from their burdens, and their dispositions will become tranquil. When sentient beings recite the name of Buddha I will hear the sound of footsteps in an empty valley,⁵⁴⁶ my heart will be moved, and I will arrive to provide assistance.

Mr. Yang: I just heard you say that if you recite the name of Buddha your burdens will be lifted and you will reside in the land of paradise. Is this correct?

Amitabha Buddha: If one carries the burden of sin from past lives they must not hold on to but release all of their sins. Generally, when one wholeheartedly recites the name of Buddha in any type of environment they can ascend to and enter the land of paradise to pursue further cultivation and transform their burdens into a pure land. If the burden of sin is not released it is like a curtained or concealed gate from which one can see no light. Yet my Buddha light shines everywhere and causes one’s body to become clean and their heart to become bright. Once all sin and burdens have disappeared one is able to enter the realm of Buddhas. This realm has many institutions in which one can attain cultivation (Seven Precious Springs) – and institutes which are used specifically to take away burdens and assist in the process of cultivation. Those who carry the burdens from past lives may be tied to sins that they committed before they recited the name of Buddha. After they have decided to follow the teachings of Buddhism and wholeheartedly recite the Buddha’s name while feeling regret for past sins I will feel their sincerity and automatically assist them to be saved. If one only recites the name of the Buddha but continues to commit various sins without feeling regret the Buddha whose name they recite will become as a mountain obstructed by clouds and be lost. Thus one will be unable to reside in the Pure Land with the burden

⁵⁴⁶ This saying refers to a person of unusual talent or virtue who is rarely found.

of sins from their past lives. Thus those who cultivate themselves according to the doctrines of the Pure Land have pure mouths, pure hearts, and pure bodies. With this they are near to the Pure Land but they must also accumulate the virtue of good deeds. One cannot say the name of the Buddha and not have the Buddha within their heart. Their heart must accept (Buddha) for their mouth to accept (Buddha) – otherwise nothing can be said. I have seen sentient beings in the last period sink into confusion concerning the five *skandhas*⁵⁴⁷ and the cycle of life and death. Heaven's fortune has shifted and though people are now materially prosperous they are shamelessly extravagant and cannot meet the forty-eight great aspirations. In order to save sentient beings I have expressly opened a more convenient doctrinal door. I have exhorted people to wholeheartedly recite the name of Buddha which is a simple Buddhist doctrine and a prompt method of cultivation. If people still do not know how to pursue cultivation I am afraid that we will lose them as they are beyond redemption. The Buddha has always been just and although a more convenient doctrinal door has been opened, if one's mouth says Amitabha yet their heart like a snake and scorpion,⁵⁴⁸ the Buddha does not dare come close and lead one to salvation. This is not because the Buddha is not merciful but actually because this being is far from the Buddha. Yet I hope that from today on, mortals will ascend to this Pure Land (using the doctrinal door) and will drop all worldly burdens before their self is relinquished and spiritual roots are extinguished.

Mr. Yang: Amitabha Buddha is very merciful for having opened a more convenient doctrinal door. Many old women and children carry around rosary beads and recite the name of Buddha. This devout sentiment engenders respect. According to what I have heard, if one recites the name of the Buddha they can reside within the land of paradise yet there must be another meaning. Will Amitabha Buddha explain this again?

Amitabha Buddha: The Buddha does not speak nonsense. If one recites the name of Buddha they will ascend. How are people able to ascend to paradise? Those who recite the name of Buddha can rid themselves of distracting thoughts which allows their heart and spirit to be at peace. These people's actions will not become burdens or violate prohibitions. When people are committing evil actions their mouths have already forgotten "Amitabha Buddha." Therefore, if one's mouth recites "Amitabha Buddha" day and night, their mouth will recite and their mind will think and after some time the mind and mouth will be as one. One's Buddha-nature will become conspicuous as they break from the roots of evil and a Bodhi tree will sprout and grow within the Pure Land. Those who recite the name of Buddha can drink of vitality and forget pain and worries. This can be used in meditation where "tranquility" can become "stable." This stability will lead to the intelligence that will allow you to see Buddha, one will be full of vitality and joy, and the spirit can be consigned to Buddha. When one recites the name of Buddha the heart produces a *qi* that is tranquil and

⁵⁴⁷ The five *skandhas* are the five components of a sentient being: form, sensation, conception, the functioning of the mind in its processes, and perception (Soothill and Hodous 126).

⁵⁴⁸ This saying means "vicious."

peaceful. One can then reconcile their violent and incorrect behavior, eliminate any darkness from their thoughts, and allow their *yin* spirit to be rescued. To chant the name of Buddha is exactly like broadcasting easy-listening music throughout the world. It can allow the hearts of those who hear it to feel relaxed and forget all of their troubles, sorrows, and anxieties. Thus, I exhort those on the path to cultivation, those who are ill or have suffered misfortune, and those who are troubled to diligently recite the name of Buddha. You will certainly have a miraculous experience and leave your pain to find joy.

Mr. Yang: What Amitabha Buddha has said is very true. If one recites the name of Buddha, thinks of Buddha, knows the Buddha, and sees the Buddha, they are a buddha. If one constantly recites the name of Buddha and never forgets the Buddha they will certainly become a buddha. Amitabha Buddha, the Land of Western Paradise is miraculous and beautiful. Can I introduce it to sentient beings?

Amitabha Buddha: This location is extraordinary.

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

I am willing to guide Mr. Yang to see this wonderful realm!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful that Amitabha Buddha is willing to take me along. People often think that they would like to ascend to the land of paradise. When those who are fated observe this scenery they will know that they have not thought of paradise in vain.

Amitabha Buddha: The Land of Western Paradise is the location that people say they would like to go. Its miraculous scenery is different than that of the mortal realm. Mr. Yang, follow me there!

Mr. Yang: I am willing to follow Amitabha Buddha. ...Ahead there is a vast pond. Inside there are lotus flowers of all types that are beautiful and emotive. Next to the pond there is a sign that says, “Seven Precious Springs” and it is filled with glorious gold and jade.

Amitabha Buddha: This is the “Seven Precious Springs” and within the pond is the “water of eight merits.” The gold on the bottom of the pond is gold powder and this water is “living water” with innumerable miraculous uses.

Mr. Yang: Why is this water called the “water of eight merits” and what can it be used for?

Amitabha Buddha: This “living water” has also been called the “water of Buddha” or the “water of eight merits” and its nature can always be changed. If people would like to live in the Pure Land they must bathe and drink in the water of eight merits.

Only then will they be clean. If mortals can learn these eight merits they will certainly be able to live within the Pure Land and no longer have to go through the refinement of the water of eight merits.

Water of Eight Merits:

1. Pure and Clean: People's hearts must be purified until there are no impulses or filth.
2. Clean and Cold: People's hearts must be pure and cold and free from a confused and impatient *qi*.
3. Sweet and Beautiful: People's hearts should be sweet, willing, and beautiful like water that is sweet to drink and tied to others.
4. Gentle and Flexible: People's hearts should be easy-going and flexible, not hard or stiff. This water is light and flows upwards unlike the water of the mortal world which is heavy and flows downstream.
5. Moist and Beneficent: People's hearts cannot be dried out and on fire. People should do more to assist others like water nourishes and moistens everything.
6. Peace and Harmony: People's hearts should maintain a peaceful and harmonious *qi* like water without any ripples. Immersed within this flow, this *qi* is not lost.
7. Remove Suffering: People who want to remove suffering must first recite the name of Buddha and they will then be as this water that relieves thirst, hunger, and has innumerable miraculous uses.
8. Increasing Benefits: If people want to broaden their horizons and increase their wisdom they will benefit from enlightenment. This water can be used for drinking and bathing while the body is purified and knowledge increased. It has unlimited benefits.

The benefits of the land of paradise's water of eight merits are innumerable. If people are able to practice these great eight merits daily and recite my name they will naturally share in this Pure Land. They will have no need to bathe in the "water of eight merits." Those who carry burdens with them must be refined within these waters to pass through these gates. Mr. Yang, are you willing to go down and receive the "cleansing rites"?

Mr. Yang: Right now there are many people bathing within the waters of the pond. I do not know these people so how would I dare enter the pond?

Amitabha Buddha: There is no need to be polite. The water of eight merits is used to wash away the burden of sin. This great opportunity should not be missed.

Mr. Yang: If it is so I will go down to the water. ...Oh! The water in this pond is very cold. After I immerse myself within the water my body feels lighter, like a small bird flying in the sky. Bathing in this water is like a spring breeze and my entire body feels cold, invigorated, and light. I feel "debt-free and light of body." This type of water is too wonderful.

Amitabha Buddha: You can drink a few mouthfuls. You will certainly have a wonderful feeling!

Mr. Yang: Although I bathed within it, the water is still very clean and I will drink a few mouthfuls of this water! After I drink the water my stomach and intestines feel like ice. A portion of my *qi* is forced from my body and feels as if it will lightly float away!

Amitabha Buddha: Your *qi* quickly ascends above like an airplane. Generally, if mortals can practice these eight merits they will have the feelings that you have had today and will be reborn in the Pure Land without difficulty. If those who recite the Buddha's name with complete belief still carry burdens, they must be washed in this water. This location offers cultivation and refinement and when those with heavy burdens immerse themselves in this water it is like they are having their skin peeled off. At the beginning it feels very painful but slowly gets better. They must be cleansed all the way to their bones to truly be relaxed within this paradisiacal Pure Land.

Mr. Yang: There are five different types of lotus flowers in this pond which are all very beautiful. Why are those pursuing cultivation who are bathing within the pond surrounded by different types of lotus flowers?

Amitabha Buddha: "The Buddha's name; a lotus flower." People recite the name of Buddha and emit a powerful *qi* (spirit) from their mouths. Ferried by fluid (dharma water) it transforms into a lotus flower. Therefore, the water of eight merits was originally the saliva (dharma water) produced by those who recited the name of Buddha. The lotus flower represents the name of the Buddha and the more that one recites the name of the Buddha the more lotus flowers there are. Those who recite the name of Buddha and achieve success sit upon a lotus flower. Their *qi* has ascended to this paradise and the time that they spend in further cultivation differs. For some it is a half a year, for some a year. This is determined by how weighty their burden is. If one's clothes are filthy the water of eight merits should be used (as laundry detergent and water) to clean them. If the clothes are very dirty it will take more time to wash them. In this pond one must first pass through pain (the escape from misery) before it becomes joyful. Once one's burden of sin has been washed clean, the body begins to float one can sit on top of the lotus flowers and live a carefree life in the Pure Land. This is the doctrine of the Pure Land. Today, Mr. Yang has been instructed to author a book in order to save sentient beings. I have particularly divulged these truths and I hope that Buddhist disciples, in addition to cultivating themselves according to Buddhist scripture, will understand these truths of the "Pure Land."

Ji Gong: If the heart is pure then the land will be pure! I hope that mortals will employ every effort to clean their hearts until there is no more filth. One's own home can become the Pure Land and what need have you then to search in remote locations for the Land of Western Paradise? If one "recites the name of Buddha and practices Buddhism" they will naturally become a buddha! Buddhist disciples will become

enlightened! Today our time listening to Amitabha Buddha will conclude here. Mr. Yang, climb aboard!

Mr. Yang: I am grateful that Amitabha Buddha has bestowed upon me this “water of eight merits.” My body is completely clean and I have received many benefits from this water. I bid you farewell.

Amitabha Buddha: The Pure Land is right before the eyes. I hope that mortals do not become confused as they progress forward.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
September 21, 1980

30th Journey: Travel to and visit the Palace of the Third Court...Imperial Official of Heaven

Poem: The heart that is not anxious or obstructed floats like a white cloud. In the light and gentle breeze one can sit and forget their worries. If one flows with the vulgar and pursues it to the end they will descend below. Return to the light by a myriad of Ways that illuminate tall buildings.

Ji Gong: Every time that I see people who are nervous and melancholy, whose “qi is less than excellent,” it causes my rush-leaf fan to stop producing a breeze. The locks in people’s hearts rust and they cannot be freed from their worries. Every day one exerts all of their strength to earn money, yet this fight with the copper coin only brings misery. Those people who have money are never relaxed or joyful but are surrounded by the many worries that come from their pile of money. I believe that all mortals are “people who have had this experience.” That being the case, why do you still hold onto your confusion and continue to travel down roads that will lead you to worry or continue to pick up your heavy burdens? Stupid children! Your pockets are filled with stones that you have mistaken for jewels and yet you continue to want more. It is truly innocent and cute. Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to travel while authoring his book. Mr. Yang, are you ready?

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: To author a book takes all of one’s strength. Mr. Yang, what do you think about this?

Mr. Yang: Although it is difficult, I get to joyfully travel to another world and feel the results of my hard work. Moreover, my eyes have been opened by the wonderful beauty of these spirit worlds and I have discovered much that is astonishing. I have been enlightened concerning the truth of the great Way. I have also searched for and found myself. If sentient beings can use the records of this spirit-travelogue to discover themselves and find their ideal garden they will not fail heaven’s expectations and their heavy burden will then become light. But, of course, the good fortune that I enjoy today is all because of the guidance of my merciful teacher.

Ji Gong: You carry the burden of saving sentient beings. Today you carry out that sacred responsibility as you have been directed to travel through the three realms and author this precious scripture. You could say that this is unprecedented in history. You are shouldering the Buddha’s doctrine of salvation, along with your teacher. Thus, we are able to travel together in the same vessel of mercy. I hope that sentient beings read and study this spirit-travelogue and do not just give it a cursory glance. People should

become very familiar with these blueprints and prepare for their arrival in this sacred realm. Thus it has been said, “There is nothing like seeing for oneself.” One must experience this realm for it to have significance. Otherwise, one is only a tourist looking at a map. Doesn’t this tourist still have a long way to travel? Today we will travel to a new realm. ... We have already arrived.

Mr. Yang: Ahead there are many palaces that are dignified, spacious, and old. Everything is covered with gold and there are many auspicious clouds. There are some steps surrounded by flowers, trees, and grass and when I see this palace I feel very pleased!

Ji Gong: This is the Palace of the Third Court. Today we will first pay our respects to the Imperial Official of Heaven, Emperor Yao.⁵⁴⁹

Mr. Yang: Okay! I follow my teacher up the stairs but my body feels as light as a feather. This is not like climbing stairs in the mortal realm where my legs feel heavy. Why is this?

Ji Gong: This is a “truly empty environment.” Only those free from the burden of sin can enter. Thus, when you are here your body will feel very light. Immortals and sages are able to come and go freely with completely pure bodies and minds. They can travel thousands of miles in one leap, hover about on clouds as if they are flying, and walk on air.

Mr. Yang: What you have said is miraculous. Ahead there is a large palace with the words “Zi Wei Palace” written on it. I think that this must be where the Imperial Official of Heaven resides!

Ji Gong: This is the residence of the “Lofty, Primary, and Fortunate Imperial Official of Heaven.” Let us proceed forward and pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: Within the palace sits someone wearing imperial yellow robes and a golden imperial crown. In his hands is the tablet of the imperial court and his face appears stern. Next to him there are many imperial officials who stand in welcome. ... The humble Mr. Yang pays his respects to the Imperial Official of Heaven. Today I have come with my teacher and I implore that the Imperial Official bestows upon us blessings and instruction.

Imperial Official of Heaven: Yes! The mortal realm’s Mr. Yang is able to come to this palace of heaven. You are already very fortunate so why do you need more blessings from me? You have received a mandate to follow your teacher Ji Gong through this heavenly realm while making inquiries and authoring a book. This will save many citizens and my heart is joyful. In a meeting of the three realms with all

⁵⁴⁹ Emperor Yao is a legendary king in ancient China whose reign is said to have lasted from 2357-2255 BCE.

immortals, sages, and buddhas, we were issued the Edict of the Jade Pond, Imperial Orders from the Jade Emperor, and the Register of the Third Court. Thus we know that you are traveling through the three realms and authoring a book about heaven. Often, after mortals read a spirit-travelogue they are able to change from evil to good and cultivate themselves according to virtue. This Third Court can then bestow blessings upon them and they can become free from worry and transgression. Because your responsibility is so weighty it is fortunate that you have come here today. Please, sit! I will have my immortal attendants bring you some tea.

Mr. Yang: The Imperial Official is too kind and I do not dare accept!

Imperial Official of Heaven: There is no need to worry! Within the three realms only the Way is revered. One only need diligently cultivate themselves according to the great Way and sacred virtue to be one with the beings in heaven. The sacred and profane are the same, what need is there to be polite!

Ji Gong: Sit down! The Imperial Official has given us an order that we will obey.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Imperial Official's kindness and I will obey you and sit. When I sit down in this chair I immediately feel cool and my spirit feels relaxed and comfortable. Why is this?

Imperial Official of Heaven: This *qi* is the ninth *qi* of heaven and is a precious substance. You are a mortal so when you sit in this treasured chair this ninth *qi* washes over you and that is what you felt.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. After sitting, I truly do not feel like standing up. Although it is not a sofa it feels as soft as one.

Imperial Official of Heaven: This precious chair is made from "rigid" materials but when seated it feels soft. This is because of its true *qi*. "Hard rock" seems to come to life and become "living rock" and transforms from being stiff to soft. This rebirth is like a person whose heart is made of iron or stone that has become merciful and soft-hearted. You are sitting in a chair where person and stone have already become one, therefore it feels soft.

Mr. Yang: What does it mean that person and stone have already become one?

Imperial Official of Heaven: Once people's bones begin to harden they are the same as stone. Thus, it is said that someone's bones have "turned to stone." When people die they become a pile of dust. Thus people and "stone" are originally the same. You are now sitting on stone. Above there is a "person" and below there is "stone" while each absorbs *qi* from the other. Thus it is said that they have "become one." When mortals sit in meditation they exhale their *qi* towards the ground (where it is absorbed by the stones) and inhale their *qi* from heaven (where it enters people's heads). After a

brief time this *qi* becomes full, mixes, and produces “gravel.” For you it is actually different right now. You are sitting in heaven and exhaling “heavenly *qi*” while inhaling the “earthly *qi*.” This process is inverted and you will understand how wonderful this is when you are enlightened.

Mr. Yang: I am sitting up in heaven and viewing the earth below. Although my body is inverted my heart actually feels comfortable. My feet are planted in heaven and my head is facing the earth while my spirit is suspended in space. The one hundred thousand foot deep Sea of Bitterness washes away all filth. Is this correct?

Imperial Official of Heaven: That is it! Mortals tread on the earth while immortals walk in heaven. The skills of sages and mortals are different. Those who can travel about heaven and space (on a cloud) without falling are immortals and buddhas. Can mortals do this? Those people who have this superhuman ability have already attained the fruits of the Way. Can’t you see that all of these “fruits” are suspended up in space? Mortals who study these skills should first quiet their emotions, desires, and “that which is grasped by the hands.” If one’s hands (and heart) grasp tightly and do not release one will carry with them a “trunk filled with emotion and desires.” While traveling on the road they will gasp for breath and I am afraid that they will be exhausted, confused, and desire rest before they make it to their “final destination.” If everything is put down, both arms will be free and hands empty so that one can fly. I hope that sentient beings will continue to progress until they can see heaven, know earth, and comprehend dark mysteries. When one’s heart is bright like a mirror and nature is calm like water, the eyes of heaven are opened and the heart on earth can see one’s nature in heaven. In the bright Way of heaven, one can ride the wind and walk upon clouds and will naturally find a path. Mr. Yang, please drink some tea.

Mr. Yang: Listening to the Imperial Official’s teachings is worth more than ten years of study.⁵⁵⁰ I am grateful for what we have heard about the Way. The tea of this upper realm is so clear I can see the bottom of my cup. When I tilt my head I can clearly see my reflection floating on top of the liquid and it looks just like a photograph. ...I have drunk all of my tea! There was no flavor but I feel refreshed as it flows into my heart and spleen.

Imperial Official of Heaven: That was your original appearance – the true you. Your disposition was that of a worthy (buddha) and you could pass through fire without being burned and submerged in water without being drowned. Now your image is able to float on water without sinking. This is similar to the lofty sages who can walk on clouds and travel through water without restraint. If one can see their original appearance in water they can drink the water of their original nature which will wash away filth and expand their intelligence. They can then communicate with the gods and worthies.

⁵⁵⁰This popular saying has been modified from “One evening’s conversation with a gentleman is worth more than ten years of study” (听君一席话，胜读十年书).

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Imperial Official's revelations. The Imperial Official of Heaven resides in the first of the Three Courts. Imperial Official, will you please explain your origin and sacred responsibilities in this heavenly realm?

Imperial Official of Heaven: Yes! I am willing to share a summary of my experience for mortals. When the world was first formed and after heaven and earth were separated the Five Elders formed the Official of Heaven, Official of Earth, and Official of Water. These beings govern the three realms of "heaven, earth, and water," verify that the beings in heaven have sufficient merit, and manage all disaster and fortune experienced by sentient beings. I am the original official in heaven and I was created from *yang* energy. I reside within the Zi Wei Palace and I am in charge of the *Register of Good and Evil* for all sentient beings. I also control which immortals ascend and descend. Thus I have been called, "The Lofty, Original, Heavenly Official that Bestows Blessings of the Ninth Qi, The Glorious Spirit and Great Official of the Original *Yang*, and Lord Zi Wei." In the past I was incarnated as Emperor Yao. When the various worthies in their respective constellations progress in the Way and the gods of heaven and earth save sentient beings or rescue worthy mortals for danger I will submit a petition to the Jade Emperor after I have verified their actions. They will then be promoted. If the worthies of the heavenly realm and gods of heaven and earth have failed in their responsibility or have committed a violation and I find out a fault has truly occurred I will submit a report to the Jade Emperor and they will be demoted. What I have said above only applies to the middle and lower level gods. If one is a worthy of the upper levels they have attained residency within the limitless paradise, will never again be reincarnated, and are exempt from my jurisdiction. Furthermore, those original spirits who have achieved the Way in the mortal realm must undergo an inspection by the Third Court before being assigned the results of their merit. In addition to mortal's good and evil actions, nationality is also recorded in the register. Mortals that would like to receive fortune and avoid calamity must choose between the paths of good and evil. If sentient beings decide to become better behaved they are not yet finished as they are still tied to the burden of sin from their previous lives. If mortals today can express their remorse before the gods and are willing to act virtuously I can bestow blessings upon them. If a loyal child commits virtuous actions and is willing to beseech long life and fortune for their parents while being grateful of heaven with a filial heart, the Imperial Official of Heaven must bestow blessing upon them. The Three Courts are part of the same body which sympathizes with people and attempts to save the world. Thus we bestow blessings, pardon sins, and free people from their misery and pain. If people conduct themselves properly concerning the human relationships they will be granted all that they ask for.

Mr. Yang: After listening to the Imperial Official of Heaven speak I know that people can summon their own fortune or misfortune. This heavenly official has the heart of the Buddha and guts of an immortal. With his whole heart he wishes to bestow blessing upon mortals and is truly the "heavenly heart that affects people."

Imperial Official of Heaven: Heaven and the human realm were originally together. I hope that mortals will respect and adhere to the principles of heaven. If one does not fall into the path of the human realm they will become one with heaven and can attain a place within the limitless paradise. Today you have come here so I will lead you to view this location.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir. The Imperial Official of Heaven has piles of records and documents. Are you very busy?

Imperial Official of Heaven: Because people in contemporary times are half virtuous and half evil there are many who are fortunate enough to return to the Way and I must inspect their merits. Thus there are many sacred matters to attend to. Each department is in charge of a different register and I complete the final inspection. Thus, “The power of the gods is great; they do not panic and are not busy.” Mr. Yang, your roots in the Way are very deep. Because you have come here today I am willing to divulge some secrets of heaven! I will open a register and allow you to look at it.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Imperial Official’s guidance.

Imperial Official of Heaven: This is the *Yellow Register of Merits*. I will open it a little...I do not want to make any noise.

Mr. Yang: Inside there is a record of the merits committed by the phoenix practioners from our temple:

1. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times attending a spirit-writing session: 5 merits.

2. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times rushing from another location to attend a spirit-writing session: 10 merits.

3. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times exhorting people to do good: 10 merits.

4. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times donating money to have morality books printed: 100 merits.

5. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times that one endures an insult without complaining: 100 merits.

6. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times one sees lewd material and avoids it: 300 merits.

I also see another section:

1. Years ____ Months ____ Days ____ = ____ number of times one commits virtuous deeds and beseeches heaven on behalf of their father ____ bestows blessing and increases their life by half a period (six years).

2. ____ number of times that one commits good deeds and is willing to happily accept their fate; given blessings and light.

Imperial Official of Heaven: What you have read is sufficient. Sentient beings must understand that causes have effects that are based on facts. As soon as one energetically seeks virtue, diligently cultivates themselves according to the Way, and accrues sufficient merit they can ascend to the halls of heaven. There they will be carefree and extremely happy. If sentient beings read this entire spirit-travelogue and seek out virtue, cultivate themselves according to truth, and comprehend the Way they will return to this Palace of the Third Court within one hundred years and I will give them a chair and ask them to sit. I hope that sentient beings do not miss this excellent opportunity!

Ji Gong: Imperial Official of Heaven we must now descend below. I am grateful for your mercy in enhancing my disciple's spirit. Imperial Official, we bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: At my teacher's urging I must bid you farewell. I am grateful that the Imperial Official of Heaven has expanded my knowledge. I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple!

Imperial Official of Heaven: I wish you well on your journey.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
October 7, 1980

31st Journey: Travel to and visit the Palace of the Third Court...Imperial Official of Earth

Poem: *When one regrets the past they cultivate a virtuous cause. Greed, anger, thoughtlessness, and passion are most injurious to the soul. One must guard against the loss and collapse of the spirit's life. Refine an enduring and firm body.*

Ji Gong: Some people have said, “You are all sinners!” I say, “Mortals are without sin!” Some people are not convinced and say, “I have committed many evil deeds so how can I be without sin?” I say, “Since you have admitted your sins what else can I say?” Mortals are truly without sin and it is only through the “four prohibitions” that one becomes a “sinner”! Do not become discourteous in that which you see; do not become discourteous in that which you hear; do not become discourteous in that which you say; do not become discourteous in that which you do. People often commit these actions with the utmost effort. No wonder they become “people that violate the four prohibitions” – sinners. People originally arrive in a body that is pure and naked and don clothes when they reach the mortal realm. They then lust after the four prohibitions, love the ten evils, and the record of these sins will stain an entire page. People do not need to be happy and also do not need to be sad. Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to pay his respects to the Imperial Official of Earth who pardons all sinners. We will beseech him to pardon sentient beings in the hope that mortals will reform and never again commit “sins.”

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: Today we will travel to the Palace of the Third Court and pay our respects to the Imperial Official of Earth. Let us depart... We have already arrived at the three palaces. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: We have come here previously. In front of us the road splits and we take a large, yellow road. We travel straight to a large palace where there are many lofty sages coming and going. There are also many who have been cultivated that are returning to heaven. All those who have attained cultivation undergo inspection at the Palace of the Third Court and appear very busy.

Ji Gong: The Imperial Official of the Palace of the Third Court is called “Duke of the Three Realms” on earth. The Imperial Official of Earth serves under the Jade Emperor and all documents must undergo his examination before being sent on to the Jade Emperor. Those mortals who truly attain cultivation through the fruits of their merits must pass through examination at the Palace of the Third Court before being sent to another heaven for further cultivation.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. The large palace before us has the words “The Palace of Purity and Emptiness” written on it. Its glory dazzles the eye. Is this the residence of the Imperial Official of Earth?

Ji Gong: Yes. We will enter and pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! We enter the palace and in the center sits someone dressed in imperial robes. In his hand is a jade tablet and he appears very solemn. Your disciple Mr. Yang pays his respects to the Imperial Official of Earth. Please Imperial Official, reveal the error of our ways.

Imperial Official of Earth: There is no need to be so polite! Today you have arrived with Ji Gong at the Palace of the Third Court and I am very pleased. Please sit and I will order my immortal attendants to bring some tea.

Mr. Yang: We are grateful for the Imperial Official’s kindness. Today I have been greatly blessed to pay my respects to the Imperial Official. I hope you will share your origin and official responsibilities so that it will be known to all sentient beings under heaven.

Imperial Official of Earth: Yes! In order to save all sentient beings the truths of “heaven and hell” will be revealed. The Imperial Official of Earth works to save all sentient beings so how could I keep secrets? I was created from a *yang* force in the Cyan Cave of Spirits as an incarnation of the true *qi* of heaven. I have been called, “The Central, Seventh *Qi*, Pardoner of Sins, Official of Earth; The Great Emperor of the Cave of Spirits, Purity, and Emptiness; and the Great Lord of the Cyan Spirit.” Because all sentient beings commit sins on “earth,” heaven’s heart is merciful and cannot tolerate it when sentient beings sink even lower. Thus, the department of the “Imperial Official of Earth” has the authority to pardon sins as long as mortals change their hearts. I want to pardon people’s sins!

Mr. Yang: The Imperial Official is truly merciful. Yet how do you pardon sins?

Imperial Official of Earth:

1. If people commit a sin, know they should change, and have a heart filled with regret, I will pardon them of three sins. If they no longer sin from the time they know they should commit good deeds I will wipe their slate clean – erasing all record of their sins.

2. Although those in the contemporary world that enter the virtuous door of cultivation with a steadfast will in the Way have accumulated the sins of the world, I also pardon them of three sins. Those who refrain from sin their entire life and are steadfast in the Way can be pardoned of seven sins.

3. To be filial is first. If one accidentally commits a mistake, but is filial to their parents, I will pardon or reduce their sins.

4. Mortals often have the heart to pursue cultivation but their trials and difficulties are many because the burden of sins from their past lives has not dissipated. If they can endure these hardships and the will of their heart is unchanged, I will pardon them of their sins and diminish their suffering.

5. The burden of sin from a mortal's ancestors has often not been dissipated and these beings are still stranded in the netherworld. Later generations can emanate a virtuous desire by doing good deeds and giving donations. I will pardon them of their sins and cause the amount of pain that sinful souls suffer to diminish.

Ji Gong: The Imperial Official was previously incarnated as Emperor Shun⁵⁵¹ thus those who are filial are especially respected. The Imperial Official of Earth resides in the center, pardons sins, and saves those who live on earth while cherishing those ghosts who live below the earth. Thus on earth he is called, "Duke of the Central Salvation."⁵⁵² I hope that mortals are able to cultivate their bodies and perform good deeds. Heaven is compassionate and loving. It certainly does not wish to add sins to people, but instead orders that sins are pardoned. Why do mortals not turn towards virtue? Heaven wants to pardon your sins but you are unable to accept this. How is it possible that there is no medicine which can save you from even the most heinous of sins?

Imperial Official of Earth: I want to pardon all sentient beings from sin and I hope that I am not abandoned by them. I hope that all sentient beings are without sin and that all people are virtuous. Then the Imperial Official of Earth will be like the Imperial Official of Heaven and only "bestow fortune."

Mr. Yang: The Imperial Official of Earth is "merciful and deserves respect." Yet most sentient beings commit evil actions daily. How do you handle this?

Imperial Official of Earth: "There are no special doors for calamity and happiness; they come as people themselves call them."⁵⁵³ Because sentient beings in contemporary times are very fortunate, all people are "blessed." However, these blessings are divided like the oil for lamps. When this fuel is exhausted, if one does not add more, the lamp will be extinguished. Just before disaster approaches, people's original spirits descend from the "Official of Heaven" to the "Official of Earth." They fall into my hands but I am merciful and I allow them to have a fresh start as I prepare to pardon the sins of these mortals. If one is confused during their lifetime and do not know which way to turn, they need only bow their head and pay obeisance to the Imperial Official of Earth who will accept their return and "pardon their sinful

⁵⁵¹ A legendary ruler said to have ruled China around 2200 BCE (Far East 1278).

⁵⁵² This center is the same used in "Zhong Yuan Pu Du" or the Ghost Festival.

⁵⁵³ This quote is from Laozi's *Book of Actions and their Retributions*.

condition.” When one dies they return to hell and if they have no proof that their sins have been pardoned, King Yan⁵⁵⁴ is unable to spare them and they will certainly be punished. I was originally one with “Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha” and the honored “Mulien.” We saved sentient beings by pulling them from bitterness with our magnanimous desire. Thus, the Imperial Official of Earth and the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha are the same being. Mulien’s filial heart saved his deceased mother. On July 15, the Ghost Festival is conducted and provides great amounts of virtue by providing salvation to one’s suffering parents.⁵⁵⁵ The Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha has also vowed that he will not attain buddhahood until hell is completely empty. When I was incarnated as “Emperor Shun” I was filial and grateful of heaven. Thus, I have many generations of posterity that till the fields.⁵⁵⁶ Because Emperor Yao abdicated the throne, he has left a good name to his posterity. The Daoist Ghost Festival and the Buddhist Yu Lan Pen Festival fall on the same day. I hope that mortals perceive that they have the same origin. Thus, if mortals are “filial” and sincerely cultivate themselves according to the Way their souls will certainly ascend to heaven after death and live a relaxed and carefree existence.

Ji Gong: The Imperial Official is compassionate to divulge information about cause and effect and allow sentient beings to know how to create mysterious wonders! They are truly fortunate!

Mr. Yang: Today, the Imperial Official has shared teachings that have augmented what I see and hear. I am infinitely grateful. Yet I still do not completely understand the Imperial Officials ability to pardon sins. Can you explain this again?

Imperial Official of Earth: Since you do not yet understand I am willing to explain it again:

1. If one enters the sacred door to devout cultivation in the Way, but their body is very sick and their vitality is weak, they often blame heaven. These people say that they have been committing good deeds for many years but heaven has failed to protect them and they have met with much illness and suffering. The Third Court checks to see if in a previous life they were a butcher and how many living beings they killed. Although in their later years they have changed their actions, worship the Gods, and are respectful of the Buddha, their merit is not sufficient. In this life they have a family, commit virtuous deeds, and cultivate themselves according to the Way. Yet in the previous life they killed many living beings and thus in this life one’s bones and muscles are sore and one is constantly ill. Heaven is merciful and their darkness will be dispelled. Therefore, after their whole body is in pain – “suffering” – one will start to feel “happiness” because this suffering has wiped away the burden of their sins. If one can endure without withdrawing their heart in the Way, I will feel their sincerity

⁵⁵⁴ King Yan is the ruler of hell.

⁵⁵⁵ For more on the Ghost Festival see Teiser (1988).

⁵⁵⁶ Tilling the fields refers to the fields of merit that have been passed on by Emperor Shun to his posterity.

and pardon or reduce their sins. They will then recover peacefully and safely. If one suffers difficulties and is unable to endure, I will have no opportunity to pardon their sins. Thus, I hope that sentient beings will maintain a strong will and when they encounter various difficulties they calm their mind and repent. One cannot blame god or man, or the burden of their sins will be difficult to erase.

2. Some deceased and sinful ghosts fall into hell where the pain is difficult to bear. In addition to discussing salvation from suffering, each year in the seventh month the Gate of Ghosts is opened one time which allows lonely ghosts to travel and visit relatives. Living relatives set up a feast and worship while relieving the hunger and thirst of the ghosts. Daoists call this “Zhong Yuan Pu Du” and they offer various fruits, flowers, precious objects, and food and drink. All the ghosts are very happy. Buddhists call this the “Yu Lan Pen Festival” and they set up basins that contain every type of fruit while each monk battles with great virtue and strength to provide salvation for deceased parents.

Mr. Yang: The Imperial Official is merciful in providing salvation for those of the *yin* and *yang* worlds. Your sacred virtue is without limit! When I was young I lived out in the country. Late every night during July my father had to arrange the imperial officials and gods within our home and light a lamp near the road. He said that this illuminates the road for lonely ghosts and makes it easier for them to travel. What do you think of this? In this contemporary time of industry and commerce cities are rarely like the country once was. Does this effect how ghosts travel?

Imperial Official of Earth: The netherworld is like a starry night. Sinful souls are imprisoned within to receive gloomy punishment. The *yang* world is living and merciful. In the seventh month, those who set up lanterns to illuminate the road and make it more convenient for these lonely souls to travel will receive limitless merit. In the world today, science and technology have advanced and there are abundant sources of power. Streetlights are bright in both the city and countryside and traveling souls can easily see the road. Thus, if a residence does not put out a light it has no effect. This is what is known as, “When times change, teachings also change.”

Ji Gong: Today’s meeting with the Imperial Official will now conclude. Prepare to return to the temple.

Imperial Official of Earth: I bid you both farewell. I hope that more mortals will turn towards virtue and cultivate their bodies while turning away from the deep abyss of sin and evil. I will then no longer have to manage or pardon the sins of sentient beings. People are not sages and worthies and a fault confessed is half redressed. If you are able to confess your former sins I will repay you by immediately washing your slate clean and I will pardon you of all your sins. I hope that sentient beings will grab this great opportunity as it is hard to recover from many disasters.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Imperial Official’s golden words. I bid you farewell.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
October 31, 1980

32nd Journey: Travel to and visit the Palace of the Three Courts...Imperial Official of Water

Poem: *A group of cyan mountains is excellent scenery. The nature of fresh water is warm and gentle. The sprinkle of water and way of world is endured with a sigh. It is difficult to invert the flow of light and dark.*

Ji Gong: Every day before people sleep they must bathe. Sweat is rinsed away quickly by cool water and one can sleep and dream happily! During this time you can again examine you mind's thoughts which have unceasingly fluctuated day and night. These thoughts are full of selfish desires, emotions, and anger. The master of your heart is so tired and haggard it cannot endure. Do you bathe daily to allow this master to be cool, to be cool? If you do not, this master will become sweaty and filthy and no one will dare to come near you. The immortals and buddhas will also stay away and you will descend to become a "ghost of the trash." Did you know this? Today, I will guide Mr. Yang to the Palace of the Three Courts to pay his respects to the Imperial Official of Water. We will ask the Imperial Official to use his water of teachings to relieve distress and dissipate disaster for mortals and wash clean their bodies and minds. The fortune of mortals is not shallow.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: ...We have already arrived. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: Why is there a river here? Why is the water so clear that I can see to the bottom?

Ji Gong: This is an extension of the Imperial Official of Water's spirit and *qi*. We will travel along this main road next to the river and proceed forward to pay our respects to the Imperial Official of Water!

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir? Each palace of the three courts has a different appearance. Why are the creations of the universe so mysterious?

Ji Gong: When the universe began and all things were created they each had their own specific form. People's bodies also have three courts and if you can comprehend this you can understand everything.

Mr. Yang: Beside the river there are weeping willows and green trees. The scenery here is pleasant.

Ji Gong: Even though the scenery here is solemn it is very natural and is truly a green and immortal realm. “Qing Hua Palace” is before us. We will enter and pay our respects to the Imperial Official of Water.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! ...Your disciple Mr. Yang pays his respects to the Imperial Official of Water. Please bestow upon us your teachings.

Imperial Official of Water: Mr. Yang, there is no need to be so polite! You and Ji Gong have been charged with the same mission, to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and to exhort people from taking the wrong path. I am very pleased! In this spirit travelogue you have traveled throughout heaven to view its scenery. Every blade of grass and tree, every mountain and river, every word and smile hide infinite and mysterious secrets. Everyone who is fated to read this book and wishes to travel among the gods should do so carefully or they will miss an excellent opportunity. This book is extraordinary. Because Mr. Yang has employed his roots in the Way his intelligence is vast. Thus he can comprehend the wonder of heaven’s scenery and author this spirit travelogue. This will truly be a wonderful book throughout the ages. I am very pleased that you have come here today and I will order that my immortal attendants bring you tea.

Mr. Yang: The Imperial Official has been too kind in his praise and encouragement. I am fortunate to be able to follow my teacher through heaven and author this book. I am grateful to the Imperial Official for his benevolence.

Imperial Official of Water: Mr. Yang, why are you crying?

Mr. Yang: Ever since I entered this sacred door I have wholeheartedly represented and declared the joys of heaven. However, I feel that this book is too profound to be understood by the masses. Thus I sigh because though my heart is filled with desire, my strength is not sufficient.

Imperial Official of Water: You should not be sad. All human affairs occur according to fate. Your heart is a mirror image of heaven and your sacred pen rouses the heart of humanity and corrects the way of the world. Your *qi* is very strong and your responsibilities are weighty. I hope that your will does not wither. Heaven is wonderful and will certainly not forget you.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Imperial Official’s reassurance.

Ji Gong: My worthy disciple should not be sad. You have me by your side so where are you afraid that we will be unwelcome? I am clothed and have a bowl for alms in my hands. There are temples everywhere and our responsibility is of the utmost virtue. Just take each step as it comes! Today we have come to visit the Imperial Official so you should take this opportunity to ask him more questions!

Mr. Yang: Okay! Imperial Official, what do you do at the Court of Water?

Imperial Official of Water: I am the “Imperial Official of Water who descended from the Original Essence.” I focus on relieving distress and dissipating disaster for mortals. Why am I in charge of relieving distress? Because mortals are polluted by dirt and filth evil invades their entire body and they become sinners. Sinners live in the *yang* world and must submit to that world’s laws and punishments. They are also subject to the laws of heaven and its punishments. This leaves people feeling that these punishments are not reasonable. When people have been ill for a long time, fail to receive what they ask for, are in a constant state of disaster, and are in pain and suffering I have the authority to act and relieve their distress. All sickness and misfortune is called “disaster and distress.” The character for “disaster” was formed from the character for fire. Thus water must be used to regulate these disasters. The Court of Water is like the water from rivers and seas. It can wash away all filth, eliminate pain, cool the body and mind, moistens what is dry, mitigates complaints, promotes growth, and dissipates all disasters. Thus on earth it is said, “All is swept away with the rivers and seas.” Water is also able to relieve all the hate of the human realm and wash away all of the stains of sin. It is only through water that the disasters and distresses of mortals can be washed away.

Mr. Yang: The Imperial Official uses water to wash away the suffering and disasters of the human realm and irrigate that which is poor and barren. Your merit is immeasurable and I kneel in respect before you! However, I am still unclear about many areas. Imperial Official, please instruct mortals on what methods they may employ to dissipate disaster.

Imperial Official of Water: Being born as a human is like a boat traveling on the open seas. It rides the winds and waves and is constantly in motion. When young one travels along the road stumbling often until one’s feet are broken and bloodied. When one has grown, life is physically and mentally exhausting. One’s body and mind are so weary they can no longer endure. I use hot water to wash away this weariness and use cold water to wake them up in the morning. I also often add additional *qi* to their body and mind. When people are tired I send water to coat the outside of their body and regulate their temperature so that they do not overheat. People are like automobiles. They rush along the great road of life but with safety mirror they can see at all times. The existence of humanity continues the life of the universe. People serve as the heart of the universe when they develop a true *qi* and Great Way. Thus they are very precious. There are three courts, “heaven, earth, and water.” The Court of Water is also the Court of People. People have bodies of flesh and blood and are easily injured. Therefore, the Court of Water dissipates their disasters at all times. I hope that when sentient beings encounter difficulties they will recite my sacred name aloud so that I can emancipate them from suffering.

Mr. Yang: Your merciful heart causes people to feel moved. Mortals all wish to avoid distress and disaster but do not know how. Imperial Official, can you inform them?

Imperial Official of Water: Heaven does not send down disasters and is most afraid of the disasters created by mortals. These mortals do not know the Way of Relieving Distress and Dissipating Disasters. “If one maintains purity, no disasters or distress will come near.” If one has undergone all types of disasters but has a remorseful heart and commits good deeds without returning to evil the Court of Water will relieve their distress.

Mr. Yang: When mortals encounter pain or suffering, how will the Imperial Official relieve this distress?

Imperial Official of Water: The water in the river before you can be used to rid people of disaster. It could be called the “water of the soul.” Calm your soul and look at the water. Can you see its mysteries?

Mr. Yang: When I calm my soul and look there are many small people swimming in the water. Who are these people?

Imperial Official of Water: When mortals become widows or orphans, harm their descendants, and become sick or suffer it is because they have not repaired wrongs from their previous lives and thus they are experienced in this life. If virtuous men and believing women are calm day and night, bathe, burn incense, devoutly recite scriptures, and repent and start anew their original spirit can bathe within this river. They will then diminish their pains and escape from suffering.

Ji Gong: The Imperial Official of Water has already bestowed many teachings upon us. The Imperial Official manages the water (and people) of the universe which is a weighty responsibility. In bestowing blessings, relieving distress, and dissipating disasters the Imperial Official is considerate of all sentient beings. You could say that you possess the heart of the Buddha and insides of an immortal. Your merit is very vast. We will now meet together with the three Imperial Officials from the Three Courts and listen to their official mandates.

Imperial Official of Water: The Imperial Official of Heaven and Imperial Official of Earth are already waiting for us inside the Palace of the Three Courts. Let us enter together!

Mr. Yang: Okay. The three officials are like one family. I am very fortunate to be able to listen to the three officials at the same time. I truly feel very fortunate. ... We have already entered the Palace of the Three Courts!

Ji Gong: Al though the Palace of the Three Courts is separated into three courts there is still a large palace in the middle where everyone meets together to work. Right now

we are already inside this central palace and the Imperial Officials of Heaven and Earth are waiting inside.

Mr. Yang: I humbly pay my respects to the Imperial Officials of Heaven and Earth. The inside of this palace is full of sumptuous fruit and immortal goods which cause one to drool!

Imperial Official of Heaven: Mr. Yang, there is no need to be so polite. Today you have toured the Palace of the Three Courts so we have especially set up this banquet as a reward for how hard you have worked to author this book.

Imperial Official of Earth: *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is nearing its conclusion. The merit of Ji Gong and Mr. Yang is vast and will remain forever on the heaven's registers. In the salvation of sentient beings they have served as god and angel and have broadcast this fortunate news to the world. They have ensured that sentient beings turn towards virtue and return to their destiny in the universe. They have promoted world equality and their virtues are limitless.

Imperial Official of Water: Ji Gong is the guide on this journey and leads Mr. Yang all throughout heaven. They inquire after its residents, pass on the truths that they learn, and manufacture the food of space (spirit) in an age of science and technology. It is only when one's spirit is cultivated and nurtured that the human realm can enter into happiness. One is then at peace and can enjoy using the products of science and technology. Otherwise, the intelligence of humanity will serve as a path to self-destruction. How could the hearts of buddhas and immortals bear this misfortune? Thus they have revealed these teachings. If each person on earth is able to cultivate their body and nurture their spirit they will transform the impure world into a Pure Land and the beings in heaven will rejoice!

Imperial Official of Heaven: Ji Gong and Mr. Yang, please eat! There are fine beverages, immortal fruits, and wonderful things that cannot be found in the mortal realm. This is bestowed upon you by heaven and you should enjoy it freely.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Imperial Official's kindness. You are truly too courteous! Today I must also thank my merciful teacher Ji Gong for his guidance.

Ji Gong: Teacher and disciple are like father and son, so what do you have to be concerned about! Before the beginning of time I had pledged that I was willing to return and assist you. Now is that time thus we have been fated to be together, travel throughout the three realms, and author a book to save the world. I hope that my "carefree and virtuous nature and more convenient doctrinal door" will ensure that I am close to the old and weak, women and children who will each become Buddhas or immortals! Mr. Yang, your responsibilities are weighty. You must spread this merciful news to ensure that sentient beings receive these teachings and attain enlightenment!

Mr. Yang: I will obey my teacher's instructions. Merciful teacher, please guide me!

Three Imperial Officials of Heaven:

Poem omitted due to redundancy.

This is precious information from the Palace of the Third Court. If mortals often read these verses aloud they will receive a response. We have prepared this small banquet as a token of our respect. When this book is completed there will be another banquet at the Jade Pond which we are looking forward to.

Ji Gong: Today's banquet with the three Imperial Officials will now conclude. Mr. Yang, thank the Imperial Officials and prepare to return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: Today we have had wonderful beverages and beautiful fruits. I am infinitely joyful and grateful to the Imperial Officials for this kindness.

Three Imperial Officials of Heaven: There is no need to be polite. You reap what you sow and attain the fruits of the Way that you cultivate. We hope that you will continue to work hard.

Mr. Yang: We bid farewell to the Imperial Officials. I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
November 13, 1980

33rd Journey: Travel to the Palace of Loyalty and the Palace of Filial Piety

Poem: *The painstaking concentration of attention creates something precious. Merit is bequeathed eternally and speaks the truth. The spread of new knowledge establishes a road to the halls of heaven. Upon death harness an auspicious cloud and become a god or immortal.*

Additional Poem: *The sand of the planchette box has worn the willow stick. Tree sap congeals to create a multi-colored iris. A fortunate earth and heaven returns to sacred virtue. The lotus flower rises from the Jade Pond.*

Ji Gong: The virtuous edict of the Jade Pond and the Gold and Jade Edict of the Imperial City proclaimed that *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is nearing completion. The road to heaven has been silently tilled and weeded by many who have already found a virtuous end. This road is one on which people can come and go. If mortals would like to travel on that road there is the route of good and that of evil. People should be cautious in their choice! The end of the virtuous road is called “heaven” and the end of the evil road is called “hell.” Which end are you traveling to? Once one has read both *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* one will become their own judge and they will know in their heart if they will ascend to heaven or descend to hell! Immortals, Buddhas, and King Yan only reflect your true appearance back to you and one can certainly not blame King Yan for being cold and emotionless. If a person is without the Way only their face will display in this reflection. This false appearance is also that which you give to King Yan. The merciful and smiling faces of immortals and Buddhas beckon you to them. Their genial faces are learned from your own example so you do not have to thank them too much. These two types of different appearances are both the true representations of sentient beings. You must complete the painting of your own appearance as no one dares to take that responsibility. I hope that sentient beings listen carefully to what I have said. Otherwise, when they meet me upon their return and ask to hear my teachings I will have already communicated them via the “planchette.” Today I will again guide my worthy disciple Mr. Yang to visit the halls of heaven. Prepare yourself!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, take off!

Ji Gong: Teacher and disciple ride the lotus flower platform throughout the three realms and provide an impressive description of these locations. When seen by sentient beings this causes them to be exuberantly happy! However, there are still many people who do not understand the meaning of happiness and enjoyment. I sigh when I think they may be lost. Mr. Yang, what do you think?

Mr. Yang: For several years I have been following you, my merciful teacher, and I have benefited a great deal. I have happily followed you through the three realms and you could say that I have received the fortune of three lives. Sitting aboard the lotus flower platform, although it is light and requires no effort to move, I still feel the weight of responsibility. I do not dare neglect this responsibility for a moment or lower my guard.

Ji Gong: Those who settled a barren land performed a sacrifice. Even if this land was covered with brambles and thorns and blood dripped from their wounds they looked upon their new roads, which had so many people traveling on them, and naturally presented a “forced smile” that was some comfort.

Mr. Yang: What you have said is true. If you allow yourself to feel at ease and allow sentient beings to have direction only then does the journey of life have value.

Ji Gong: We have arrived. Quickly dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: To what location have we traveled today? Why do the people before us have a martial might that is different than most?

Ji Gong: This is the Palace of the Three Courts’ “Palace of Loyalty.” Those people who you just saw have all sacrificed their lives for their country. After death they ascend to heaven to become gods. Let us proceed forward and pay our respects!

Mr. Yang: ... We are already inside the Palace. I see many people wearing military and official garb sitting inside. Who are these people?

Ji Gong: From ancient times, those loyal, filial, and righteous all ascended to heaven and became gods. Sitting within the palace is Yue Fei⁵⁵⁷ and other loyal state ministers and martyrs. They sacrificed their lives for their country and after death their spirits ascended to heaven, their sacrificial stands were covered with incense, and their good name was left for eternity. Others here were incorruptible officials who were not greedy and did not steal but benefited the populace. After death these officials can ascend to heaven to become gods. They will live a carefree and relaxed existence in halls of the Palace of Loyalty or live in the various heavens and undertake sacred responsibilities! Thus it is said, “The upright and unselfish are called gods.” They are upright, unselfish, and cultivate themselves according to a “just Way.” One day heaven will need this type of talented person. Therefore, how can those mortals who worship and pray to the gods be blessed? If one wishes to thank those who sacrificed they cannot pay off the gods because they are just and only depend on the sincerity of sentient beings’ hearts to be moved. Mr. Yang, you can ask questions of Yue Fei.

Mr. Yang: I pay my respects to Yue Fei and all loyal sages and worthies! What is your life like in heaven?

⁵⁵⁷ General Yue Fei (1103-1141 CE) was a hero during the Song Dynasty.

Yue Fei: I originally worked within the Jade Emperor's palace but I specifically came to the Palace of Loyalty today to share my story. The universe was originally part of the true *qi* but in these contemporary times of scientific prosperity the virtue of mortals has declined and evil flourishes. This has caused the original *qi* of the universe to gradually diminish and thus there are more disasters. I hope that mortals will follow the sacred example of Confucius, "an upright mind and cultivated body," as the world's guiding principle. When one is engaged in official business they cannot be greedy, corrupt, fraudulent, or waste public funds. Each employee should seriously protect their post and all people should be completely loyal and patriotic. In order to protect the borders some must sacrifice their lives. The souls of these heroes will ascend to heaven. This is why Guan Gong's saying, "The sincere heart is manifest day and night; a loyal spirit pierces heaven and earth" is placed on each temple and worshipped by people. Thus I hope that sentient beings will "love their family, love their village, and love their country most." Qin Gui,⁵⁵⁸ the traitor whose skillful trap harmed the loyal and just, lived ten lives as a swine and now endures punishment in A Bi Hell never to be born again. Heaven above loves the "loyal and just" while the "unrighteous" reside in hell. Thus mortals cannot betray their country or they will be despised by all people while alive and punished forever after death!

Mr. Yang: To be "loyal, filial, and righteous" is the Chinese tradition of moral excellence and are also the objectives advocated by phoenix halls. To pursue cultivation is to cultivate oneself in the Great Way of "loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness." Without these principles there would be no Way to attain cultivation in. Oh! On the wall before us hangs a list of all the names of those loyal ministers and martyrs from previous dynasties. Why does it sparkle and emanate light?

Yue Fei: This is the list of the loyal and righteous who are now gods. When those loyal and righteous ascend to heaven their names are called aloud as an "announcement of heroes." When they return to heaven they are extremely happy.

Ji Gong: Because time is limited we must visit another location. Thus we will bid you farewell.

Mr. Yang: I bid farewell to Yue Fei.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, follow me. We will proceed forward to the "Palace of Filial Piety" and those who are filial and have become immortals and sages!

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! I follow my teacher to the palace gates. This palace is enormous and the words "Palace of Filial Piety" are written on it. It is truly a magnificent sight.

⁵⁵⁸ Qin Gui (1090-1155 CE) was a prime minister during the Song Dynasty who executed General Yue Fei (Far East 1110).

Ji Gong: Filial piety is the foundation for all human relationships. People must observe this principle or they will become a “sinful and rebellious child”! Within the Palace of Filial Piety are filial sons and daughters. Let us proceed forward to pay our respects.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! We enter the palace and I see the merciful and kind faces of many men and women. They are dressed in both ancient and contemporary clothing and sit within the palace playing chess, drinking tea, and playing the zither. They appear truly carefree. Who are they?

Ji Gong: These are all filial children from ancient to contemporary times. Present are males and females, young and old. The 24 filial stories have been passed on to modern times and are still taught to the population. After filial mortals die and are examined by the Palace of the Three Courts they ascend to the Palace of Filial Piety to live a carefree and relaxed existence. Those who have particularly cultivated merit may also ascend to various heavens to enjoy their fruits in the Way. You can see the names of all the filial hanging on the wall sparkling and emitting a bright light. This is the “Register of the Filial.” I hope that when the filial sons and daughters of the mortal world have parents who pass away they will offer them sacrifices and sweep their tombs. Thus they will repay their ancestors for their kindness and support. Mr. Yang, you can proceed forward and ask those who are filial about their most filial experiences on earth.

Mr. Yang: Okay! Filial being, can you share what types of filial actions you performed with the people of the world?

Filial Being: I am too embarrassed to say! I just completed the responsibility of a son or daughter. I remember when I was on earth that my family was very poor. My mother died when she was young and my father became an alcoholic. There was also an elderly grandmother who lived with us and after my father was drunk he would become unfilial and often curse at my grandmother. I would do my best to stop him and my father would beat me which I endured without complaint. As my grandmother became older and her body weakened she found it hard to eat coarse food so I took a job and secretly fed her food that I purchased. My father continued to drink excessively and at fifty years old he passed away from cirrhosis of the liver. At this time I was bound to my grandmother by our common destiny and cared for her daily while earning money to provide for her needs. I felt in my heart that no one else could care for my old grandmother so I refused all offers of marriage. After my grandmother passed away and was buried I was a thirty-eight year old that lived alone. I released all of the hired laborers and lived frugally. I knew intimately the sufferings of the poor so I took all of my surplus money and gave it to the needy. I did not accumulate any wealth and I passed away when I was sixty. My spirit was guided by Guanyin and I attained cultivation in the Purple Bamboo Grove of the Southern Sea. I have now achieved my position here. Because I cultivated myself according to the “Way of Filial Piety” I often come to the Palace of Filial Piety to receive and instruct those who

are fated. Today Mr. Yang has arrived at this location and I have shared my own brief story of filial piety with mortals. I hope that people follow my example and respect their parents and elders. Thus it is said, “The impoverished family raises a filial son.” The period of suffering in the mortal world is short while enjoyment in heaven above lasts forever.

Mr. Yang: Your filial heart is moving and I salute you!

Filial Being: There is no need to be so polite! I can see from the circle of light that surrounds your head that you are truly cultivated in the Way. I hope that you share the Way of filial piety with all sentient beings.

Mr. Yang: Thank you for your words. When one obeys the Way of filial piety they are following the moral excellence of ancient China.

Ji Gong: Our time is short. Prepare to return to the temple!

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
November 23, 1980

34th Journey: Travel to the Realm of *Yin* and *Yang* to Watch People's Return to Heaven

Poem: *Traveling throughout the halls of heaven meeting with various immortals. Speaking with the voice of thunder and guiding the heart. The love and desire of the human realm bewilders the soul. It causes some to jump outside the net of heaven.*

Additional Poem: *This spirit travelogue includes all types of teachings and scriptures. If you diligently cultivate your original nature you will escape from the netherworld. Mr. Yang and Ji Gong together wield a pen. This precious treasure is eternally fragrant.*

Ji Gong: *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is a “collection of precious methods of cultivation.” Often, those who have a will in the Way become aware of many wonderful principles and discover that the immortals and Buddhas stand before them. Human affairs are a void fantasy. If those who are cultivated want to ascend to heaven they must become more than a person. They must be extremely intelligent or during this short life as a bewildered soul they will not find the road that leads above. Once one is tired they must lie down to rest. Therefore, within the process of cultivation a good teacher and helpful friend are essential. Yet the evil and unorthodox, absurd and unthinkable cannot be allowed near or studied if one wishes to avoid descending on the path of demons. Sentient beings think that my process of cultivation is varied. Actually, I have only one “Buddhist heart” and one spirit of “aid for all.”⁵⁵⁹ My actions were truly ordinary but because sentient beings were so accustomed to living selfishly they thought that my behavior was strange. If you do not have this ability then do not mimic my performance in the human realm because it was flawed and tragic. Generally, one can perform the play of aid for all but should certainly not attempt to act in the play of selfishness. A year and a half ago I was ordered to guide Mr. Yang through the halls of heaven. I was infinitely grateful to undertake this weighty responsibility and very cautious to complete this mission. How dare one take this as child's play! Mr. Yang bears the burden of responsibility but finishes what is started. When we meet with a lofty sage we ask them about truth, when we meet with a scared Buddha we ask them to reveal their teachings. Each sentence carries profound and wonderful secrets that are truly worthy of Zen masters and their disciples. In our few final stops I should feel relaxed and at ease but this is not the case because the confused are still confused and the enlightened are still enlightened. Of those driving on the road to heaven some have begun to drift to the left, some are dozing off or sleeping, and some are too capricious to be wholly absorbed in their driving. Looking down from the clouds I can see that many have already gotten into accidents. Thus I will leave you with these words. Those who have entered these sacred doors should do more to foster a “sacred heart” and only then will

⁵⁵⁹ The pronunciation of “aid for all” is Ji Gong.

their sacred spirit not be extinguished. My suffering heart has already been exhausted so we will again see how people travel along this road to heaven. Mr. Yang, prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: Teacher, why are you repeatedly sighing?

Ji Gong: I have no more words for sentient beings!

Mr. Yang: My merciful teacher cares very deeply and your disciple feels the same. Teacher, please open your heart!

Ji Gong: I have had wine but do not know if I am intoxicated. No heart can see the Buddha. People walk on earth and the Buddha views them from heaven. It is truly a pity when those with excellent fates become a “widow or orphan.” Let us proceed to heaven! ... We have already arrived. Let us dismount from the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: Why is the location that we have come to today completely different? I think we have previously seen the left branch of this road.

Ji Gong: This is the Realm of *Yin* and *Yang* where three roads intersect. Before, when writing *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* you came to this location. Today I have brought you to this location to see what happens to people after death as they travel to heaven or hell.

Mr. Yang: Oh! So it is thus. On the left is the road that stretches to hell and you can see ox-head, horse-faced demons that have detained the many sinners. They shout at the sinners to move and it is truly too pitiful.

Ji Gong: This is the fate of evil people and is what they have thought about and asked for in their dreams (their return home). In life they were accustomed to manipulation and struggle, committing crimes, lawlessness, and a life spent concealed in darkness. Thus they are going to the netherworld which you could say is a very suitable arrangement. You can also see those people who are traveling to heaven.

Mr. Yang: There are also many people traveling on the golden and large road on the right side. The road looks very carefree and there are bodhisattvas, golden boys, and jade girls there to welcome the travelers. This appears to be the result of the many merits they accumulated on earth! It appears as if on the road to heaven these people are divided according to rank. Is this correct?

Ji Gong: Of course. Just like cars in the mortal realm have different name brands and prices and are divided by high and mid-level quality or whether they are old or new. As mortals attain cultivation some still retain small falsehoods. If part of their heart is true then part of their body will be golden. Likewise, one gradually becomes a golden-bodied immortal or Buddha. Yet within these beings there are still ranks as there are

high and mid-level golden-bodies. Those who travel to hell are “rotten wood that cannot be engraved.” We will proceed forward and ask questions of these lofty and virtuous sages who have attained cultivation!

Mr. Yang: Okay! This person is very elderly and is completely surrounded by a golden light. They appear very merciful and cultivated. May I ask where you are going?

Elderly Person: I am going to heaven.

Mr. Yang: Can you tell us about your life?

Elderly Person: I have no merit and I am too embarrassed to discuss it.

Ji Gong: There is no need to be polite. We were ordered to write a book and if you share something good with us it will be passed on to mortals and your merit will increase exponentially.

Elderly Person: Because my words will be passed on to mortals I will speak with you. I am from the south and after my children were married I went to work at a temple. There I assisted people, offered incense, and served tea from morning to night. I wholeheartedly served the gods through this hard work. Because I often frequented this temple to help there were many donations which I used for its maintenance. I did not dare use these donations for myself but instead bought incense and materials needed for the temple. I was incorruptible and fair. Thus, immediately after I passed away the gods of the temple reported to the Jade Emperor that I should be exempt from hell and directly ascend to heaven. There I will accept the responsibilities of a god and I will just be a “duke.”

Ji Gong: A duke, a duke! You should not sell yourself short. There are many mortals who are not equal to you! The Jade Emperor has given you the responsibility to become a god and I will bestow upon you one hundred additional merits to help you rise to a higher rank.

Elderly Person: I am grateful to Ji Gong for this promotion.

Ji Gong: There is no need to be polite as you have done well! Mr. Yang, you can inquire after another person who is traveling to heaven!

Mr. Yang: Okay! Young girl, you do not look very old. Why are you traveling on the road to heaven?

Young Girl: I pay my respects to the merciful Ji Gong. Today as I meet with teacher and disciple my heart is full of grief. Why am I not able to stay in the world and

accumulate more merit while teaching others the path to cultivation? Why was I so quickly summoned back to heaven?

Ji Gong: Time! Fate! There is no need to be sad. You were very respectful of me and have accepted my salvation so you will now receive the fruits of your merit. You were still carrying some worldly desires from your previous life but today the burden of your sins has been wiped clean and your human body passed away so that you could return to heaven. Look! Manjusri Bodhisattva has already come to take you to the Western Paradise. Quickly kneel before him.

Manjusri Bodhisattva: Please stand! There is no need for ceremony! We have been fated to be teacher and disciple but because you still had some worldly desires you had to undergo one more reincarnation. Your burden of sin has now been paid and your spirit can return to the Western Paradise. I am grateful that Ji Gong has revealed how to enter into cultivation so that today people can shed the burden of their sins.

Ji Gong: Manjusri is too kind. Mortals do not dislike my teachings of convenience as I illuminate and receive all. However, it is only because this girl has virtuous roots that she is able to cultivate herself according to the Way and act morally. Mr. Yang, you can inquire after other lofty sages who are returning to heaven.

Mr. Yang: Okay! The faces of those traveling the great road to heaven are all smiling. I can see that as they progress forward they are holding on to infinite hope! Excuse me master, where are you going?

Revered One: I am traveling to the Western Paradise to meet Amitabha Buddha.

Mr. Yang: Your roots of intelligence are vast and deep. Your merit is vast and four rays of the Buddha's light shoot forth from the top of your head. Can you tell me what method of cultivation you used on earth?

Revered One: When I was twenty years-old I left home and became a monk. When I entered those gates I made four vows to, "never fight with others, never complain to the Buddha, never disparage other teachings, and to never be greedy or desireful." I only cultivated myself according to these four vows and never amassed any merit.

Ji Gong: You are not a common monk and do not belong with them as you truly stand out. Therefore, today you can travel directly to the Western Paradise just as you wished.

Mr. Yang: Merciful teacher, must everyone who ascends to heaven travel on this straight and large road?

Ji Gong: The "road to heaven" is true and straight while the "road to hell" is bent and crooked. This straight and large road to heaven is formed by how a person feels inside.

People cannot deceive their hearts or insides and upon death, unless you are completely free from any karmic recompense, you must first disappear into hell before you can travel to heaven.

Mr. Yang: Where does this road go?

Ji Gong: This road goes directly to the Gate of Southern Heaven and then on to various heavens.

Mr. Yang: Why do we not see these people mount the clouds and ride the mist?

Ji Gong: We are too near to the mortal realm and the beginning of the road to heaven must be tread upon by one's feet. The middle section is the "Heart Pass" where the heart beats faster and faster until one wants to fly. Once one passes this section their mind is opened and Mount Ling appears before them. One must then climb to the summit of this mountain, the top of the head, and if one wants to ascend further they must mount the clouds and ride the mist.

Mr. Yang: What does this mean? Please explain it for me.

Ji Gong: They are Chan subtleties and allegories! I am willing to explain and allow those who are fated to comprehend them. When people reside on earth and cultivate their body according to the Way they must first stand on their feet to be able to walk the great road to heaven. When one progresses up a level they must have pure roots of the spirit or their entire body will be soiled. If one is so filthy they cannot face other people how can they face heaven? To progress another level one's stomach and intestines must be pure or the road before them will be crooked. Mud is difficult to travel through and leads to the road to hell. To progress another level the heart must maintain ordered beats and must never become frightened. One's eyes must remain pure so that the road to heaven can be seen. To progress yet another level one must reach the summit of Mount Ling. This location is a "mountain range above the mundane world" and is a "platform to heaven." If one steps into the void their body will become light and free from all burdens of sin. One's feet will step on white smoke (this smoke is from the original *qi*, not the smog left from car exhausts). The body has no obstructions and departs this mortal realm by treading on the clouds as transportation. One can then roam through the realms of heaven and earth. This is the principle by which immortals and Buddhas harness and ride clouds.

Mr. Yang: This wonderful principle is a method that can be used by those cultivated.

Ji Gong: We are finished viewing the Realm of *Yin* and *Yang*. We now know that heaven and hell are created by people's own hearts. If you would like to travel on a particular road the responsibility is yours to choose! We will prepare to return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple.

Ji Gong: We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. Soul, return to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
November 26, 1980

35th Journey: Travel to the Three Realms, Encounter the Eight Immortals, and Examine the Wondrous Teachings

Poem: With the fate of eternity one steps through these sacred halls. Roots of intelligence are planted deeply to withstand the pull of the raging tide. This book about heaven compares favorably with the beautiful, golden, and resolute Analects. The spirit-travelogue that endures can be called the elixir that saved the world.

Additional Poem: He rides the vehicles of the clouds or lotus flower platform while sitting in meditation. He feels that the road is open to travel through the three realms. Accompanied by an immortal he diligently inquires after the Way. Led through heaven he sees the Tathagata.

Ji Gong: Teacher and disciple sit aboard the lotus flower platform as if riding a cloud vehicle to outer space. Today we are able to do this because of lifetimes of accumulated fate. Many students who enter these sacred doors also ride around together in cars. They most certainly have a linked fate with their companions that they should treasure. When riding in a car full of passengers one will share their name and aspirations with others. This honesty is very interesting. This vehicle that is packed full of passengers has a great responsibility. Thus the car's owner must know where each of the passengers is going. If they drive like a bad taxi driver then when the vehicle reaches a stop all of the passengers will disembark and certainly not ask for a ride again. I have family everywhere and I am certainly not worried about this matter. I am only afraid that people will not take advantage of their fate. As people travel about in an empty car they should not hesitate to pick-up other passengers or they will regret it later. *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* has reached its 35th journey today and there is only one more station before the end of the line. Yet what location will the next vehicle depart for? The sign has not yet been posted and it will be decided by the performance of each student. Mr. Yang, prepare to climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. My heart feels particularly relaxed today.

Ji Gong: When you complete the mission bestowed upon you by heaven you will certainly be filled with infinite joy.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful that you have led and inspired me for many years and ensured that I continued to progress forward.

Ji Gong: Yet I hope that this great master has produced a superior disciple. Only then will people not laugh.

Mr. Yang: Yes.

Ji Gong: Let us depart! Today you may open your eyes and view the scenery!

Mr. Yang: That would be great. Often, when I sit aboard the lotus flower platform I close my eyes and sit in repose because it travels too fast. Will my eyes be irritated today when I open them?

Ji Gong: Your fruits of the Way are already ripe and when you open your eyes you can withstand the bright rays of light in this sacred realm as well as the rushing wind. Often, those who are cultivated must first accumulate merit to develop the discerning eyes of the gods. Otherwise, they will be plagued by demons and obstructions that will cause their vitality to be weak or mind to be confused. If one who is cultivated first performs actions of merit it is like assembling the components of a television. When one's merit is sufficient it is like a complete television which, when the "plug" is inserted, will immediately display an image. One's marvelous abilities are then limitless. Those who possess a will in the Way and long for a body of virtue will strengthen and cultivate their own abilities if their components are not complete and could damage their vitality or sight of the gods. We will now proceed to heaven!

Mr. Yang: The lotus flower platform quickly flies forward and I can hear the sound of whistling wind. When I lower my head I can see the bright lights of the mortal world. Through the developments of science electric lamps put out a great deal of light and it seems as if there is almost no night.

Ji Gong: No wonder mortals find it difficult to distinguish between *yin* and *yang* or invert the two.

Mr. Yang: Auspicious clouds float in midair and light emits from them in all directions. Immortals and Buddhas travel about on these clouds and it seems as if they are traveling in a forgotten realm of clouds. This is a completely pure atmosphere and inspires a type of forgetful mood. There are some immortals that appear before us. Are these the Eight Immortals?

Ji Gong: Yes, these are the Eight Immortals. They knew that we would be passing through this location today so they came to greet us.

Mr. Yang: I am truly too happy that I can see the true form of the Eight Immortals. I pay my respects to the Eight Immortals.

Elder Zhang Guo:⁵⁶⁰ Please arise! Today we knew that you would pass through these immortal mountains so we came here to talk to you.

⁵⁶⁰ Elder Zhang Guo (張果老) was a Daoist alchemist during the Tang Dynasty.

Mr. Yang: Today I am very fortunate to meet with the Eight Immortals. Can the Eight Immortals perform some type of magic to allow my eyes to be opened to this world?

Elder Zhang Guo: Yes. After authoring *Record of a Journey to the Underworld* and traveling throughout heaven you are truly too hard-working. We will employ some immortal techniques to make you feel better. I will go first. What would you like to eat?

Mr. Yang: I would like to eat some immortal fruits that cannot be found in the mortal realm.

Elder Zhang Guo: That is simple. When you look at both of my hands they are completely empty. Suddenly, a “seed” appears which I bury within the clouds. After some rain, wind and a few days how does it look?

Mr. Yang: Wonderful. It has already sprouted into a tree.

Elder Zhang Guo: After one month, two months?

Mr. Yang: It is already two feet tall.

Elder Zhang Guo: One year, two years, three years?

Mr. Yang: It already looks like a large tree with many leaves.

Elder Zhang Guo: Is it blooming?

Mr. Yang: In that instant the immortal tree begins to bloom. It is beautiful and moving.

Elder Zhang Guo: What has it produced now?

Mr. Yang: The flowers from the tree suddenly fall and there is fruit which is not yet ripe.

Elder Zhang Guo: Do not worry. Wait for me to change it... Is the fruit now ripe?

Mr. Yang: The immortal fruit becomes ripe in an instant and emits waves of fragrance causing one to drool with desire. Can I pick one?

Elder Zhang Guo: There is no need to be polite. Just pick one and eat it.

Mr. Yang: Because Elder Zhang Guo has allowed it I will take this opportunity to eat my fill. ...I ate three in a row and I am completely full. There is no way that I could eat anymore.

Elder Zhang Guo: Your appetite is too small. I will pick several more for you.

Mr. Yang: There is no need, no need! I am reluctant to eat them because I am afraid that my stomach cannot handle it.

Elder Zhang Guo: So it is thus. I will not force you to eat them but I will give these immortal fruits to others who are fated to consume them! I will give you one bag that you can bring back for your friends and relatives to taste.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Elder Zhang Guo.

Elder Zhang Guo: My magic trick is complete. Mr. Yang, what grade would you give it?

Mr. Yang: One hundred points.

Elder Zhang Guo: You are too enthusiastic. You can also share with me any critiques that you have of this trick.

Mr. Yang: I don't dare.

Elder Zhang Guo: Do not be polite. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to test you.

Mr. Yang: Because Elder Zhang Guo has commanded it, how do I dare disobey! Elder Zhang Guo's "trick" was full of meaning and secretly revealed the process of cultivation. One must first possess roots in the Way and the seed of intelligence. These should be planted in solid ground and moistened with the water of merit. When they undergo hardships it allows them to break forth from their false shell and reach towards heaven (as the seeds of the Way sprout). After a day, a month, a year of irrigation, fertilization, and painstaking care this tree of the Way will grow, blossom, and bear fruit. Moreover, once this tree of the Way bears fruit it is not for a single person to taste but should be enjoyed by relatives, friends, and all sentient beings. If people enter these sacred halls to represent heaven and declare the Way they will ensure that their relatives and friends will receive the shade of their tree. They will also assist in the salvation of their ancestors who will similarly benefit from this cultivation. Elder Zhang Guo, please grade my statement.

Elder Zhang Guo: You are truly "able to judge." I will give you the same grade that you gave me, a perfect score.

Mr. Yang: I don't dare accept! Thank you for your teachings.

Elder Zhang Guo: Please Elder Lü, display your skills!

Elder Lü:⁵⁶¹ Hello! I am not a wandering magician and I have no special tricks that I can perform but I am willing to show you a small bit of magic. I will put down this gourd that I am carrying and you can look inside to see if anything is happening within it.

Mr. Yang: Okay! Inside the gourd I see nothing but blackness.

Elder Lü: Okay, watch when I chant this incantation. “This gourd is empty yet it contains heaven and earth. It conceals the entire universe where the drama of life is played!” Ha, ha! Mr. Yang, look inside my gourd again to see what is there.

Mr. Yang: I am looking inside. Oh! Inside the gourd I can see heaven and earth. It is just like a telescope. I can see mountains and rivers, houses, and smoke from people. It is like a large movie screen. I can see people being born, going to school, getting married, getting promoted, joyfully playing, eating together, and strolling through department stores. It is very lively. Oh! Now I can see a hospital and someone lying sick on a bed groaning in pain. In an operating room blood drips from a knife as it cuts through flesh and there is a painful groan, the sound of weeping, and panic-stricken expressions. Now I can see the scene of a traffic accident. They brake and collide into the lens. It truly causes one to be frightened. I can see those who have died and family weeping at their funeral. Some are in a mortuary freezer lying in a row with other corpses. ... Suddenly I see the two words “The End,” and a bell sounds which causes me to awaken. Elder Lü! What I saw was so frightening.

Elder Lü: There is no need to be frightened. The title of the film that you just saw is “The Journey of Life.” This film was shot and edited by me. The script is not fabricated but is completely genuine. The action is natural and the emotions are true. This film is a best-seller in various countries and created an unprecedented stir. It is quite a pity that people only attended the showing of this film but were unwilling to watch and enjoy it. Originally, people’s eyes were glued to what was happening inside my gourd thus they did not know that they were also starring in their own film. These precious lenses are best given to one’s own descendants to watch.

Mr. Yang: The miraculous techniques of Elder Lü are truly boundless. After one awakes from this evanescent dream they are still creating a movie.

Elder Lü: In order to save sentient beings it is best that I distribute these films. Each time I broadcast the film of someone’s life it serves as an example to other mortals. Today I have shown this older film within the newer film of *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* and I hope that sentient beings do not miss the opportunity to see it.

⁵⁶¹ Lü Dongbin (呂洞賓) is considered the leader of the Eight Immortals.

Ji Gong: The skill of the Eight Immortals in magic is profound. If all of the Eight Immortals displayed their skill I am afraid that sentient beings would become disoriented and drowsy. Therefore, we will now bid farewell to the Eight Immortals and travel to another location.

Mr. Yang: Okay! I am grateful to the Eight Immortals for their wonderful performances. I will now follow my teacher to another location.

Eight Immortals: We will meet again later and we wish you a smooth journey.

Ji Gong: We will climb aboard the lotus flower platform and visit the Gate of Southern Heaven again. We just encountered the Eight Immortals among the clouds and viewed several of their performances which were rich and inspiring. ... We have already arrived at the Gate of Southern Heaven so we will dismount from the lotus flower platform and pay our respects to the Great Sage.

Mr. Yang: The Great Sage has already appeared before us giggling. He looks very happy.

Ji Gong: Yes he is. We usually fly through the Gate of Southern Heaven in an instant and the Great Sage has no chance to talk to us. Today we have been reunited so of course he is happy.

Mr. Yang: I pay my respects to the Great Sage.

Great Sage: There is no need for such respect! Today you have returned to the Gate of Southern Heaven and I am very pleased. You have traveled throughout the halls of heaven to author this book and your responsibilities are almost complete. Thus I am very pleased. The announcement at the Gate of Southern Heaven is about to be torn down. Mr. Yang, you may now look at this announcement. On previous journeys you came through in such a rush that you could not see it up close but you can now read it.

Mr. Yang: Thank you, Great Sage. On the Gate of Southern Heaven hangs the Edict of the Jade Pond and the Gold and Jade Edict of the Imperial City. These are exactly the same as the ones that we received at our temple. They explain that we have been ordered to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Each heaven has been ordered to assist us and they cannot violate this order. After reading the edict my heart is filled with infinite warmth and gratitude. I am grateful for the kindness of the Golden Mother and Jade Emperor. Two years have passed and during that time I have disturbed the peace and cultivation of many immortals and Buddhas in these upper realms. The mercy of heaven is vast and difficult to recompense. I kneel before all of heaven and offer my thanks...

Great Sage: You are truly a person with much heart. You may arise as your great responsibility is complete. Your merit is as grains of sand at a river. You should rejoice and celebrate!

Ji Gong: I am grateful for the Great Sage's assistance in ensuring that we smoothly completed our mission. We will now bid you farewell. Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful to the Great Sage for opening a more convenient gate for us. I bid you farewell. I am already seated aboard the lotus flower platform. Please teacher, return to the temple!

Ji Gong: I will now take you on a journey through the three realms. We will be as a swift wind and only glimpse the scenery for a moment. You should sit firmly as your mortal body will briefly feel currents of electricity. All of the students within the temple can observe this. We will now begin our journey. (At this moment, Mr. Yang stands before the planchette and both of his feet rise off the floor as if he is riding on a cloud. He swiftly flies about and revolves without stopping. Those within the temple see this and stare dumbfounded while gasping at this mystery). We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Mr. Yang, dismount from the lotus flower platform. *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is now complete. In an instant I led Mr. Yang through the three realms. When his body was revolving he was already back at the temple. Those who have seen this mysterious display cannot believe it. These students are fortunate to be here for the writing of this heavenly book and have truly achieved three lifetimes of cultivation. I do not know when I will meet with those who missed this opportunity again. In the Palace of the Jade Pond the Golden Mother is currently preparing a feast. At the next meeting I will guide Mr. Yang to participate in this banquet with all of the immortals and Buddhas of heaven. On that date Mr. Yang's body and mind must be pure and he must not act discourteously. Mr. Yang, your soul has returned to your body.

The Living Buddha Ji Gong Descends
November 30th, 1980

36th Journey: Thanks given to the Multitude at the Banquet of the Palace of the Jade Pond

Poem: If one experiences the most difficult trials their will should not be affected. The trees on the road to heaven are engraved with inscriptions. The vast Sea of Bitterness is illuminated by a lighthouse. Sacred virtue is spread among the myriad Buddhas.

Additional Poem: The dharma drum is hit after thirty-six journeys. Confused people have been awoken and will now push towards heaven. Mr. Yang's great duty has been completed today. Salute this with ten cups of a fine, jade beverage.

Ji Gong: We have traveled throughout all of heaven and our heavy burden is lighter at last. This spirit-travelogue came to life in front of the eyes of mortals. It is a play about the “scenery in the halls of heaven and the life of gods and immortals” that was richly and joyfully performed by Mr. Yang and me. Our performance is now complete and those above and below are mutually appreciative and happy. Yet I hope that sentient beings will not be afraid to read this when they mistakenly believe that Mr. Yang and I have performed a “moral comedy”! This is a sacred and solemn “compassionate and just performance.” However, at the conclusion of this play I would like to gauge the audience’s reaction by trading places with you. I hope that there will be applause and that I will cause no one to spit at the performers or not see this play! Today is a joyful day. Mr. Yang is properly attired and his body and mind are pure in preparation for attending the banquet of the Jade Pond.⁵⁶²

Mr. Yang: I am already prepared. For nearly two years I have followed my teacher as we traveled throughout the heavenly realm. I feel extremely grateful and emotional.

Ji Gong: I feel the same. As we sit aboard the lotus flower platform I hope that all sentient beings can be carried aboard it and saved!

Mr. Yang: Yes, yes! As we sit aboard the lotus flower platform it has increased several times in size. There are lights that shoot from it in all directions and it sparkles. It is truly cute!

Ji Gong: A minute to till the fields, a minute to harvest. This lotus flower platform will allow us to sit for a long time without sinking. You can see that its strength and endurance are extraordinary. This is because it has been moistened with the water of the dharma and it sheds all filth. Thus this lotus flower platform is in full bloom and has increased in size. This is the result of your labor.

⁵⁶² A similar banquet occurs in chapter ninety-eight of *Journey to the West* when Sanzang’s travels to the Western Paradise are at last complete.

Mr. Yang: I do not dare accept credit.

Ji Gong: There is no need to be polite. We will now proceed to the Jade Pond! ...

Mr. Yang: Why is the heavenly realm unusually busy? It resembles a marriage celebration.

Ji Gong: This is because of the salvation of souls in the three realms. Everyone here is aware that today we have been commanded to complete this book about heaven. Both humans and heaven are rejoicing and all of the gods, immortals, and Buddhas are joyful. This is because we now have a precious book that can be distributed throughout the world and assist sages, worthies, immortals, and Buddhas in exhorting and saving people.

Mr. Yang: So it is thus. I am aware that this is a heavy burden to honorably bear this sacred responsibility and represent heaven. ...The entire heavenly realm is filled with a bright, penetrating golden light. It is truly a marvelous sight.

Ji Gong: This is the “light of heaven.” I hope that mortals will follow this bright light towards the road to heaven. Here there is no darkness or pain there is only an infinite light and happiness. We have already arrived at the Palace of the Jade Pond. Let us dismount from the lotus flower platform!

Mr. Yang: Oh! In front of us there is a crowd of immortals and worthies. A light shoots in all directions and there is a full banquet prepared before us. There are also immortal women playing harmonious music which causes one to feel completely relaxed.

Ji Gong: Guanyin has appeared before us.

Guanyin: Today I am infinitely happy and have specifically come to this banquet. Ji Gong, you have guided Mr. Yang throughout this upper realm so you should have the seat of honor!

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang followed me here so we will sit together at the seat of honor.

Mr. Yang: I do not dare. There are so many immortals and Buddhas. If we sit in the back with them it will be good enough.

Ji Gong: Today there is no need to be polite. Listen to what Guanyin has said!

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! I can see many sages and worthies whose hearts are frightened and restless. They are looking at me and smiling.

Ji Gong: We will sit here!

Mr. Yang: Okay. This table is filled with wonderful and rare fruits and there is also a bowl of some fine soup. It emits a wonderful fragrance and I am very pleased.

Guanyin: Today's banquet has been bestowed upon us by the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond. All sages, immortals, and Buddhas from the three realms have been invited to attend and each of the founders of the major religions has also arrived. Elder Lü Dongbin and the other Eight Immortals have also arrived.

Elder Lü: Today I have been commanded by the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond to serve as the master of ceremonies at this banquet. Ji Gong and Mr. Yang, today you have been invited to accept this honor at the Jade Pond. This is truly a great and joyful heavenly celebration. All of the immortals, sages, worthies, and Buddhas have arrived so it is time for this 108 seat banquet to commence.

Mr. Yang: All of those present have sat around a circular table. There are people from each religious tradition who are wearing different clothes and have particular appearances.

Ji Gong: Although each religion is different and has its own mode of representation the objective of each is the same. These objectives are to promote the spiritual nature of humanity, to enter an age of equality and unselfishness, and provide relief to the entire world. Thus all those involved must have a compassionate heart and Buddha-nature. Today they have attained the fruits of their merits and will not undergo further reincarnations. Right now the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha and other sages are arriving.

Elder Lü: I reside in the Golden Imperial City and serve in the Jade Emperor's administration. Now, in this period of salvation, the courtyards of heaven are full. Today *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* is complete and will ensure that those sentient beings who have a will in the Way will have clear understanding how to achieve cultivation and pursue an existence in this heavenly realm. This will ensure that mortals do not blindly pursue cultivation so they are very fortunate. Right now the Jade Emperor and Golden Mother of the Jade Pond are arriving. All immortals, bodhisattvas, Buddhas, gods, and people must arise and bow to greet them.

Golden Mother: There is no need for such ceremony. Please stand.

Jade Emperor: All those who are now standing can be seated.

Golden Mother: Today we are celebrating the completion of *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. This mother's heart is very pleased so I have decided to hold a banquet at the Palace of the Jade Pond. All the worthies of the three realms were invited to be present at this banquet.

Jade Emperor: The kind edict was mercifully bestowed that a description of these halls of heaven should be spread to the world. Today this book of heaven has been completed and I am very pleased. The Golden Mother has set up a feast in celebration which reveals the vast kindness of heaven and its affection for all sentient beings. I hope that all sentient beings realize this of heaven and return to the road of virtue, purify themselves of all human desires, preserve their heart according to the principles of heaven, diligently cultivate themselves according to the Great Way, realize their original nature, and perfect their human nature. Once the body dies the spirit will recognize these foundational principles. I hope they do not fail the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond. Let us begin this banquet. Ji Gong and Mr. Yang, please begin!

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, do not be polite. This banquet was mercifully prepared for us by the Golden Mother and Jade Emperor. Let us begin!

Mr. Yang: Okay. The exquisite immortals are happy and the immortal women put on rainbow colored garments and begin to dance. They are elegant and graceful in their movements. How do they learn to dance like that?

Ji Gong: Lots of exercise, frequently open the heart; do not eat greedily, diligently cultivate one's nature. These immortal women do not have worries or concerns. Their heavenly garments are worn for their entire lives without being changed and the more they wear them the more beautiful they become. Because their bodies are healthy their immortal appearance does not fade. Their skin is as milk and roses and is truly too cute.

Mr. Yang: What you have said is true.

Golden Mother: Ji Gong and Mr. Yang, do not just talk and forget to eat this delicious feast.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Golden Mother for your concern.

Ji Gong: We will now eat as much as possible! Today we will not get full on immortal fruit but open our stomachs to accept all of these wonderful goods.

Mr. Yang: Yes! This wonderful taste is difficult to forget. I have a glass of this fine beverage and its aftertaste is spectacular. I will offer my merciful teacher a glass.

Ji Gong: I have stopped drinking alcohol and have found other beverages to replace it. I believe that it will prolong my life and I will save more people this way.

Mr. Yang: My merciful teacher truly likes to joke. Sitting near us at this table are the Golden Mother, the Jade Emperor, Three Clarities, Three Officials, and the founders of religious traditions. They all have a smile on their face and are participating in this joyful banquet with a harmonious atmosphere.

Dao Zu:⁵⁶³ Originally, the Way could not be spoken of. *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* has already said much and if sentient beings do not study this book I also have nothing to say. I hope that people will realize the true righteousness of Wu Ji and attain the road to heaven.

Amitabha Buddha: Originally, Buddhist doctrine could not be spoken. Today it has been shared in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. People must contemplate more often to achieve comprehension. If people do not talk to Buddha, Buddha will not talk to them. This is like a Western Paradise without the Buddha. Thus I hope that Buddhist doctrines are spread throughout the world and cause people to become Buddhas and see the Buddha.

Confucius: Confucianism does not speak of matters of the world of spirits. Yet if one hears of the Way in the morning they can die at dusk without regret! Heaven commands that one speaks of the Way, hears of the Way, and understands the Way. One will then be matched for and compatible with heaven. Heaven is one with humanity and allows them to transcend life and death. Confucianism has its own Way but this virtuous and sacred realm transcends it.

Golden Mother: This great banquet has begun and the immortal peaches are ripe. I hope that sentient beings pursue cultivation, obey the principles of heaven, and defend the human relationships. We will prepare a seat of honor for these people at the banquet of the Jade Pond and wait for their arrival.

Jade Emperor: I hope that the minds of infants will be kept pure and they will not participate in any moral degeneracy or walk the path of evil. Thus they will avoid an evil and corporeal retribution.

Great Sage: This spirit-travelogue is complete and the true teachings are flourishing. The sacred religion provides salvation through Mr. Yang's use of the planchette. Those who are fated will read his words and will comprehend that they must be cultivated and act properly to achieve true results. If they slander others they will sink forever on an evil path.

Orders from the Golden Mother: Mr. Yang supports Confucianism. He was first ordered to follow Ji Gong through the three realms and author *Record of a Journey to the Underworld*. This book provides salvation for those beneath heaven, corrects people's thinking, diminishes moral degeneracy, purifies filth, and has established a standard for all mortals. Today, in order to block the road to hell, the gates to heaven have been opened. I sent down an edict to author *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* which reveals its wonders to the world and provides a ladder to heaven. Today the thirty-sixth journey in this spirit-travelogue will be completed and my heart is very pleased. Mr. Yang, you have not failed me. We sent a Tang Dynasty monk from the

⁵⁶³ This is Laozi.

Western Paradise to lead you on this journey and together you endured hardship and criticism. You passed through repeated trials but your true spirit persisted. I will bestow upon you the ability to ascend to heaven and according to your merits you will never again be reincarnated. The students at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies are very hard-working. They assisted in the completion of this book of heaven and I will bestow ten merits on those who started and finished this process. Their names will be noted on the registers of heaven and I hope that they will continue to be diligent. Mr. Yang has completed what he was commanded to do and still maintains his strength of cultivation. His spirit is unobstructed so he will receive a new mission to avail himself of the teachings and Way of Wu Ji and save more sentient beings. This is what I command.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Golden Mother for your merciful edict. I feel that both my body and mind are exhausted and helpless. I beseech the Golden Mother to bestow upon me the light of intelligence and assist me to save more sentient beings.

Golden Mother: There is no need to be anxious. Heaven will take care of you and is often with virtuous people. If you have exhausted all of your strength declaring the will of heaven it will certainly assist you in realizing your wish to save more sentient beings. Do not be discouraged. In the future your sacred virtue will be used to correct the way of the world and this is a great responsibility. Although you have completed the two spirit-travelogues to heaven and hell, heaven still relies on you to disseminate its teachings. This provides fortune to people and saves those who are confused. I hope that you will expend every effort to continue this work.

Mr. Yang: I am grateful for the Golden Mother's vast virtue and compassion. I will do as you command.

Ji Gong: Mr. Yang, you are very fortunate. Today you have received another edict from the Golden Mother and attended this sacred event. You should maintain a happy demeanor as there is no need to be so anxious. I will give you a rush-leaf fan from which blows a pure breeze. You are now free to travel throughout the earth and seek out those people who are fated!

Mr. Yang: I will follow in my teacher's footsteps! I hope that you are still willing to lend me a helping hand.

Ji Gong: After years of friendship how could I forget you? Relax!

Mr. Yang: Okay, I will relax.

Orders from the Golden Mother: You are very virtuous! Ji Gong has led Mr. Yang through the three realms to make inquiries for this book and bring salvation to all sentient beings. You have attained the highest rank of Buddhahood and a light emits

from you. Through hundreds and thousands of million reincarnations you are an immeasurably merciful Buddha.

Ji Gong: Thank you Golden Mother for your kindness. I enjoy being free and I would like to pass on these merits and title of Buddha to other sentient beings for whom they are fated.

Elder Lü: This banquet has concluded. Mr. Yang, prepare to thank your benefactors.

Mr. Yang: Yes, sir! This insignificant being has received the kindness of heaven today. My country, parents, and teachers have assisted in the development of my morality. Ever since my body entered this sacred door I have received kind acts from heaven. I was commanded to follow my merciful teacher Ji Gong through the three realms and author a book. Today that book is complete and I have been invited to attend a banquet with the Golden Mother, Jade Emperor, and the various sages and Buddhas. My heart is moved and my body is full of admiration. I thank you for your kindness and I am willing to obey your sacred desire that I continue on this holy road.

Golden Mother: Mr. Yang, arise or your effort will cause you to be too tired. I am happy that this spirit-travelogue will be distributed. Those who are confused and will be touched or return to a virtuous path are too numerous to count. Although you are exhausted, as a man soweth so shall he reap and if you plants seeds of the Way you will attain the Way. Today the lotus flower platform is in full bloom and your fruits have already been attained. Your heart should be comforted. For the students of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies I bestow a pot of fine wine. I command that Ji Gong bring it back and drink some which will help the spirit and intelligence of all.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Golden Mother.

Ji Gong: This pot of fine wine must be difficult to come by. This is the product of much blood and sweat and has been congealed over time from the spirit and atmosphere of the universe. It looks cloudy like a sweet dew and is truly one of heaven's excellent products. There is one immortal peach remaining. Mr. Yang, eat it!

Mr. Yang: I am too full.

Ji Gong: Then I will infuse its juices into this fine wine and share it with the students of the Hall of the Sages and Worthies!

Mr. Yang: That is great. My fellow male and female students are very hard-working. How can it be that I alone enjoy this? To give some to them is the right thing to do.

Ji Gong: Okay.

Elder Lü: This banquet is over. Everyone arise and see Ji Gong and Mr. Yang back to their temple.

Ten Thousand Immortal Buddhas Approve: Yes! Your merit is immeasurable.

Mr. Yang: Thank you Golden Mother, Jade Emperor, and all of heaven's immortals, gods, sages, and Buddhas. I hope that the light of the gods shines on you all.

Ji Gong: I am grateful to the Golden Mother, Jade Emperor, and all of the sages, immortals, and Buddhas. I now bid you farewell. Mr. Yang, climb aboard the lotus flower platform.

Mr. Yang: I am already seated. Please remember to bring the pot of wine.

Ji Gong: Do not worry! Let us return to the temple.

Mr. Yang: I bid you farewell! A song is played at my departure. I am reluctant to leave and feel sad.

Ji Gong: This is my last stop as tour guide and driver. Mr. Yang, you should foster your vitality and after you dismount you should have a satisfying rest and calmly cultivate your *qi*. I hope that at a later date it will be you that drives this lotus flower and I can serve as your companion and accompany you as you travel about saving those who are fated.

Mr. Yang: I also hope this will be so. I am grateful that you have quickened my spirit and bestowed intelligence upon me. You have ensured that my ancestors and I will receive much glory.

Ji Gong: There is nothing in the mortal realm that you can obtain without working. You are fortunate because you earned it. Our cloud vehicle is sounding weaker and weaker. It is moving slowly as we carry this section of *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven*. Every word and sentence, every day, every month, and every year we have collected this precious material and compiled it into a book of heaven. I have already transported it to its final destination and this heavenly vehicle will be sent to the garage for an overhaul, a new battery, and to be refueled. After this long trip both the driver and Mr. Yang are very tired and should rest while preparing for a new journey. I will see you again. We have already arrived at the Hall of the Sages and Worthies. Soul, return to your body.

APPENDIX 3

Map of Taiwan:⁵⁶⁴

The Hall of the Sages and Worthies is located on the west coast of Taiwan in Taizhong (marked T'ai-chung-shih on the map) and the mythological theme parks are located near Tainan (T'ai-nan), Taizhong (T'ai-chung-shih), and Gaoxiong (Kao-hsiung).



⁵⁶⁴ This map of Taiwan is from The World Factbook located at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tw.html>.

APPENDIX 4

Regulations for Phoenix Halls:⁵⁶⁵

1. This hall takes Confucianism as its tradition, and the gods as [the source of its] teachings. It relies on the flying phoenix to awaken the human mind. It uses filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, and trustworthiness as the basis of establishing the self, and propriety, righteousness, frugality, and the sense of shame as the root of purifying it. All who enter under the phoenix as phoenix disciples must uphold and practice.
2. All phoenix disciples of this hall should be tidy and neat in their dress, courteous and dignified. When they enter or leave the hall, they must perform three bows to give proper weight to propriety and ceremonial.
3. All phoenix disciples of this hall should obey the instructions of the sages, respect their teachers, honor the Way, and be deferential to their superiors. Phoenix friends should be close to each other, help each other in difficulties, admonish each other over failings, and get along harmoniously.
4. This hall takes as its mission to proclaim and promote the morality of Confucius and Mencius, to revive Chinese culture, to guide the lives of the people, and to lead people towards goodness so that they may be good citizens.
5. This hall pursues absolutely not commercial or heterodox purposes. It does not permit to borrow the name of the gods while committing evil. [Instead] one should rely on the name of the gods to do good.
6. All phoenix disciples of this hall should obey the laws of the nation, control themselves and be content with their lot. They are severely forbidden to engage in falsehood, lustfulness, gambling, and robbery. They are not allowed to stir up arguments and sow ill feeling by harboring grudges.
7. At séances, the phoenix disciples should assist with piety and sincerity. When the sages and deities ascend the phoenix or when the sagely instructions are lectured upon they must stand at attendance quietly and with reverence, and listen respectfully.
8. All mediums of the hall carry the duty to proclaim transformation on behalf of Heaven. They should be true and consistent from beginning to end, exert themselves, create merit, uphold and practice [the divine teachings] through their whole life, without ever turning their back on their vow. If they deliberately commit violations and stray from the proper path, they will bring Heaven's punishment upon themselves.
9. All phoenix disciples of this hall must create merit and work towards their karmic rewards, cultivate their self and establish their character. They must exhaust their sincerity and rely on the gods to cancel their transgression and bestow blessings, so as to avoid the cycle of birth and death. Do not speak of useless efforts without benefit, or abandon your resolve and engage in willful conduct, which will [only] result in sorrow after your death.
10. If phoenix disciples of this hall violate its regulations or do not attend at the hall for one full year, a memorial will be submitted to the Southern Heaven that their phoenix register be annulled, unless there existed circumstances that were beyond the control of the phoenix disciple.

⁵⁶⁵ These regulations are translated and quoted by Clart (2003b:22-23).

APPENDIX 5

Popular Spirit-Travelogues:

This list of popular Taiwanese spirit-travelogue literature is found in Zheng (1988:417-419) and has been translated by the author.

Book Name	<i>Record of a Journey to the Underworld</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven</i>	<i>The Historical Record of Three Officials who took a Short-cut to Obtain Spiritual Perfection</i>	<i>Record of a Journey of the Son of the Spiritual Pearl (Nezha)</i>	<i>Record of a Journey Through the Good and Evil of this World</i>
The Phoenix Deity who Descended	Jigong	Jigong	Nezha	Ling Zhuze (Nezha)	Jigong
Spirit-writing Author	Yang Zanru	Yang Zanru	Wang Zeyi	Wang Zeyi	Wang Shansheng
Temple	Shengxian Tang (Hall of the Worthies and Sages)	Shengxian Tang (Hall of the Worthies and Sages)	Wumiao Mingzheng Tang (The Marshall Temple)	Wumiao Mingzheng Tang (The Marshall Temple and Hall of the Pure and Upright)	Lingyin Zishan Tang (Hall of the Efficacious, Mysterious, Compassionate and Virtuous)
Location	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Gaoxiong, Taiwan
Length of time Spirit-writing	8/16/1976-6/26/1978	6/3/1979-11/30/1980	6/9/1979-8/25/1980	8/26/1980-2/19/1981	1/8/1981-5/19/1981
Year of Publication	1978	1981	1980	1981	1981

Book Name	<i>Record of the Path's Cultivation and Transmigration</i>	<i>Record of a Journey through the Human World</i>	<i>Record of a Journey of Cause and Effect</i>	<i>The Holy Annals of the Jade Pond</i>	<i>Record of a Journey of the Daoist Ji</i>
The Phoenix Deity who Descended	Jigong	Jigong	Jigong	Nezha	Jigong
Spirit-writing Author	Yang Zanru	Zan Qinan	Wang Shansheng	Wang Zeyi	Liang Yuzhu
Temple	Shengde Tang (Hall of the Sages and Virtuous)	Shengxian Tang (Hall of the Worthies and Sages)	Lingyin Zishan Tang (Hall of the Efficacious, Mysterious, Compassionate and Virtuous)	Wumiao Mingzheng Tang (The Marshall Temple and Hall of the Pure and Upright)	Lingde Tang (The Hall of the Efficacious and Virtuous)
Location	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Gaoxiong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Zhanghua County, Township of Yuanlin, Taiwan
Length of time Spirit-writing	3/15/1981-3/3/1982	8/13/1981-10/26/1982	9/30/1981-2/28/1982	3/19/1981-5/15/1982	9/17/1982 - 10/28/1982
Year of Publication	1982	1983	1982	1982	1982

Book Name	<i>Record of a Journey to the Ninth Level of Heaven</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the Quartz Palace</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the Heavenly Buddhist Hall</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the Avīci Hell</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the World of Utmost Pleasure</i>
The Phoenix Deity who Descended	Jigong	Nezha	Tianran Shizun	Jigong	Jigong
Spirit-writing Author	Lin Zhongxiu	Wang Qimou	Ci Wulu	Qiu Jinrong	Zan Qinan
Temple	Zhongsheng Tang (The Hall of Respecting Life)	Wumiao Mingzheng Tang (The Marshall Temple and Hall of the Pure and Upright)	Tianhou Fotan (The Buddhist Hall of Summoning Heaven)	Shengtian Gong (Temple of the Heavenly Sages)	Shengtian Gong (Temple of the Heavenly Sages)
Location	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong County, Dali Village, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan
Length of time Spirit-writing	10/27/1982-2/9/1982	8/28/1982-4/30/1983	1982 - 1983	12/15/1983-4/15/1984	1/25/1984 - 7/15/1984
Year of Publication	1982	1983	1983	1984	1984

Book Name	<i>Record of a Journey of the Way of Sages</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the Spirit-world of Origin</i>	<i>The Correct Path and the Wonders of Daoism</i>	<i>Record of a Journey to the Buddhist Land of Lotus Flowers</i>
The Phoenix Deity who Descended	Jigong	Jigong	Guandi Deng	Jigong
Spirit-writing Author	Yang Zanru	Luo Feiluan	Zhang Naiwen	Luo Feiluan
Temple	Shengde Tang (Hall of the Sages and Virtuous)	Zhongsheng Tang (The Hall of Respecting Life)	Sanhou Gong (Temple of the Three Nobles)	Zhongsheng Tang (The Hall of Respecting Life)
Location	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan	Taizhong County, Wuri Village, Taiwan	Taizhong, Taiwan
Length of time Spirit-writing	4/17/1982-3/3/1984	10/28/1984-2/5/1985	4/23/1985-7/20/1985	10/27/1985-2/5/1986
Year of Publication	1985	1985	1985	1986

APPENDIX 6

Record of a Journey to the Netherworld:

This eighteenth chapter of *Record of a Journey to the Netherworld* (Tong 2005) has been translated by the author.

Record of a Journey to the Netherworld

18th Journey

The Living Buddha Jigong Descends

Sacred Instructions: Mortals, with their evil hearts, often act without principle and their sincere and virtuous intentions are not sufficient. People always think that their deceitful hearts are not known by others and that their evil actions will never be seen by others. Actually, this is a grave error. People must know that “the gods are just three feet above their head.”⁵⁶⁶ There are three gods who preside over mortal’s deportment, actions, and thoughts, the True Lord of Fate, the God which Journeys Day and Night, and the City God. Under the supervision of the Earth God they are extremely accurate. Since ancient times, people have been exhorted to follow the Way with a sincere heart and appropriate thoughts. If everyday there is a light shining about people’s heads and they always honor the gods their lucky star will shine brightly and they will naturally remain free from all troubles. If they do not, their heart and mind will remain in darkness and their sins will be very serious.

Jigong: Foolish disciple, let us travel to hell! (Jigong speaks some words and Mr. Tong’s soul follows in descent.)

Mr. Tong: Your disciple would like to ask if Elder Jigong would prefer it quiet.

Jigong: There is no need for my worthy disciple to be so polite. We can chat as we travel. (Jigong speaks some words and our sacred transportation appears before us. It shines in bright colors of gold and emerald.)

Mr. Tong: Merciful teacher! Lately the entire of island of Taiwan has been invaded by red fire ants.⁵⁶⁷ Why?

Jigong: Ha, ha! Originally, heavenly secrets could not be divulged. Today you have asked me if I can reveal the answer to these secrets. (I cannot revise this on the spot, cut from the record!) one, two reveal these secrets to mortals. The people of the precious island of Taiwan are greedy and perform more evil deeds than good. To commit cruel actions one only needs to scheme for profit or cheat to earn money. While conducting fierce and malicious affairs people will do anything. This is truly to

⁵⁶⁶ This popular saying means that the gods are always watching.

⁵⁶⁷ Red fire ants, a native of southern Brazil, were found in Taiwan’s capital in 2003 (Chiu 2004) and the first death from fire ants in Taiwan was reported in October of 2004 (Xinhua News 2005).

be without conscience. In every locale, the Earth God, City God and various other deities frequently ascend to report to the Jade Emperor and entreat him to bring about disasters and misfortune to warn mortals in order to guide their hearts to be more principled. The Jade Emperor sees these many reports and shakes his head in sympathy while sighing in lament. He then sends orders to the Department of Epidemics and after last year's outbreak of SARS red fire ants have again descended to punish mortals. Disciple, do you understand?

Mr. Tong: Oh! I finally understand. So, what should we do? Red ants are tyrannizing the entire island and no one is able to sit without first looking for them. Does my merciful teacher have any way to save the humanity from this suffering?

Jigong: Perhaps, but I only hope that humanity is able to sincerely attempt to change and diligently pursue goodness. Otherwise, it will not only be red fire ants but also other disasters and misfortunes which will certainly be sent down! You can pour soapsuds down the ant's hole which will naturally get rid of them. Of course, it must penetrate deeply to be effective because the queen ant is deep within.

Mr. Tong: Shouldn't one be scared of the consequences killing?

Jigong: If a living creature has not harmed you and you kill it, your punishment will be severe. But supposing you could release it to be reborn on a better life path, without expelling and killing everything, you could avoid creating the consequences for killing.

Mr. Tong: So what you have said is that if there is a way to expel it, then there is no need to kill it? Is this correct?

Jigong: Children can be taught to infer the rest from what is already known. Accordingly, another effective method for dealing with living creatures is to prevent them from coming around. You do not always need to kill them.

Mr. Tong: So, since we cannot kill living beings what method should be used to expel the ants?

Jigong: There is a method. You can sprinkle black or red pepper on the ants nest or in the location where the ants come in or out. This will naturally cause the ants to depart and not return to that location.

Mr. Tong: Thank you merciful teacher for divulging this information. I believe that when people see these spirit-writings they will certainly understand them clearly. So, if we want heaven to not send any more disasters people's hearts only need return to goodness and people need to stop doing as they please. The fire ants will naturally disperse and we will no longer need to exterminate them. This is the correct, original, and pure Way. If people's hearts do not return to their former goodness, it is best to

use the insect removal method of black or red pepper to disperse the ants. As a last resort one can use poison or soapsuds to wash them away but one will kill countless numbers of lives and the sins will be serious. Merciful teacher, did I speak correctly?

Jigong: You are correct. Your powers of comprehension have improved since we started. You are always able to analyze and provide a deep interpretation of my teachings. This makes me happy.

Mr. Tong: I am deeply embarrassed and I still lack the amount of merit that you have accumulated from your teachings. Your disciple thanks you.

Jigong: Ha, ha! So my disciple feels this way. This only adds to my joy. (As teacher and disciple discussed these various questions their sacred transportation quickly passed through the world of *yin* and *yang* and continued forward towards Mount Yin, arriving at the location they would be touring that day, the 14th Prison of Darkness.)

Mr. Tong: Have we arrived?

Jigong: Yes, we have already arrived at the location which we will be touring today, the 14th Prison of Darkness.

Mr. Tong: Time has passed very quickly and a large part of *Record of a Journey to the Netherworld* has already been recorded. I do not know later parts of this sacred book when can proclaim?

Jigong: My worthy disciple need not worry, you just need to have the heart to represent heaven and announce its biddings. These writings from heaven will continue, do not be anxious! What has been revealed to this point is like a seed which has been planted. Although information is withheld from eager readers, we will stop and not tell them but wait until the seed is ripe after which we will naturally have a sacred revelation.

Mr. Tong: I am grateful for heaven's great kindness. I believe that all of my temple brothers and sisters will certainly adhere to their responsibility to represent heaven and announce its biddings and proceed forward with all of their heart, strength, and diligence. If I may dare to ask, the prison to which we have traveled today is called the "Prison of Darkness." Why is it thus named?

Jigong: This is because people are shortsighted; they deceive their own hearts, cheat and oppress the good, and believe they can commit evil actions without anyone knowing. All of one's evil actions will be announced, including devious and merciless dealings and all that was not human. Therefore, heaven arranges to send people to the Prison of Darkness according to the cunning and darkness within their heart.

Mr. Tong: So it is thus. People's hearts are dark and heaven established the Prisons of Darkness to punish them. Truly miraculous! Truly miraculous!

Jigong: You can follow me inside to see and then you will understand. (At this time, Jigong leads Mr. Tong inside. As soon as they step within the prison it becomes so dark one cannot see their hand in front of their face. Because Mr. Tong cannot see he does not know where Jigong is and panics. He loudly yells, "Teacher Jigong! Teacher Jigong, where are you? Your disciple cannot find you!" Jigong takes out the "pearl that shines at night" he had previously borrowed from Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and suddenly the whole Prison of Darkness is filled with a great light. Here there are many sinful souls who have been suspended upside down, their feet above and heads below. Because they are inverted the blood flow has stopped and their faces are bright red. As consequence for their sins, these souls are pierced with sharp knives and each time they are cut fresh blood flows. Their chests are cut open and their hearts and livers are pulled out and thrown aside for the iron snakes and iron dogs to eat. The sinful ghosts let forth a blood curdling cry before fainting and dieing. The souls are then revived with some water which is poured on them by demons and their soul returns and they are again restored to their original state. This occurs over and over.)

Mr. Tong: Truly sorrowful! Truly sorrowful! When I see those who are fated, I get goose bumps over my entire body. If people could see this it would shock them to death and they would not dare commit another evil action.

Jigong: Yes. I hope that when mortals read *Record of a Journey to the Netherworld* they will awake from sin. Moreover, if they can spread this publication and exhort others according to its teachings they will obtain blessings without limit and wipe away all their sins. I will now command the demons to bring two sinful souls before Mr. Tong. Tell us, what sins have you committed and why are you here? Also, exhort mortals to change. (At this time the demons follow Jigong's orders and bring two sinful souls before Mr. Tong.)

First Sinful Soul: When I was alive I was a burglar. According to custom, I was considered a petty thief. One day I entered a wealthy mansion to steal. Because I was not careful and made a noise while rummaging through their valuables, the household's husband and wife awoke and came downstairs to investigate. I panicked and I was afraid that my position would be revealed. I was not about to stop halfway once something was started so I decided to cut their throats. After I killed the household's husband and wife I stole all the gold, silver, and valuables and left. I previously thought that these actions were unknown to gods and spirits, but who would have known that while I struggled with the husband and wife some of my hair was pulled out. This was the key clue that the police used to solve my case. I was executed later by firing squad. After I died, my soul was led here by demons and every month of every year I am in the darkness without any light. I have received the bitter pain of being hung upside down while my heart and liver are cut out. It is truly so painful that words cannot express it. Please save me Jigong!

Second Sinful Soul: Like the soul you just spoke with, I was also a petty thief. I stole unhulled rice, fruit, and fishing equipment from farmers and fisherman. If the moon was dark, the wind was big, and there were no people around I stole that which farmers and fisherman worked hard to obtain. In doing this, I destroyed the years of painstaking care and chances for success of many farmers and fisherman. Originally, I thought that I would make a large profit and, moreover, I thought that these actions were unknown to gods and spirits. Who knew that every day my actions were yielding such serious consequences? There was one farmer who was very watchful and stood guard near his field waiting for a thief to come. I did not know he was there and after stealing some pineapples I was getting ready to leave when I was discovered by the farmer and he shouted at me to stop. At this point, I became extremely angry and rushed towards the farmer. I caught up with him and beat him to death. After beating him to death I became very scared and I drove quickly to escape. I was not careful enough and I collided with oncoming traffic and was killed. After I died, the King of the Netherworld called for me and asked me why I possessed strong hands and feet but did not work. And, on top of this, stole from and killed people. I could not escape from this crime. I was sent to receive punishment in the Prison of Darkness and it has now been twenty years. I still have forty years to serve but I don't know how I will manage to get through the rest of the time. I hope that Jigong can save me!

Jigong: You two have hearts that harbor evil intentions and cruelty. You used unjust means to obtain things, harbored cruel intentions, and killed people. You have truly received the punishment you deserve. Because you have contributed today to this sacred book which will generate merit I can take three days off your sentence. Okay, today's time to write has already expired. Disciple, let us return to the temple!

Mr. Tong: Yes, sir. (At this time, Jigong and Mr. Tong climb aboard the floating platform and it quickly flies back to the Hall of Complete Truth.)

Jigong: We have already arrived at the Hall of Complete Truth. Mr. Tong's soul return to your body and I will return.

APPENDIX 7

Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld:

This is a basic outline of structures of hell found in Eberhard's (1967:30-42) translation of the 1921-22 *Precious Record for the Comprehension of the Netherworld*.

- Soul brought before City God
 - a. Good souls are allowed safe passage to the tenth hell for rebirth
 - b. Sinful souls travel to the first hell through painful locations such as the Blood River, Sea of Punishment, and Waterfall of Fright
- First Hell: Mirror of Karma
 - a. Buddhists and Confucians punished for violating their moral codes
 - b. Factory of Hunger and Thirst houses those who thoughtlessly committed suicide (the book reveals that these are primarily women)
 - c. Location for mending the classics reserved for those who committed sins instead of focusing on religion
- Second Hell: Living Big Prison
 - a. Denizens of this hell were warned of the consequences of their sins while alive but did not change their actions
 - b. The souls of some who are still alive, such as the mentally ill, physically disabled, and very sick are said to be tortured here
 - c. Sixteen sub hells house souls punished for sexual crimes, bad family relations, cheating or robbing others, incompetent doctors, geomancers, and astrologers
- Third Hell: Black Rope Hell
 - a. This hell contains sinners who violated the rules of social behavior and basic Confucian principles
- Fourth Hell: Hell of United Greatness
 - a. Most of the crimes punished in this hell are asocial acts such as the theft of bricks or parts of bridges, use of false weights, the charge of exorbitant interest, allowing one's parents to go hungry while you are rich, and people who enjoy eating beef.
- Fifth Hell: Sen Luo Hell
 - a. Souls in this hell are aware that their return to the land of the living is no longer possible and are allowed one last glimpse of home on the Wang Xiang Tai.
 - b. King Yan Luo (Yama) is the judge of this hell and the crimes punished here are predominately those committed against the Buddhist religion.
 - c. Five new sub-hells which deal exclusively with the encroach of foreigners into China
- Sixth Hell: Hell of Great Crying

- a. This hell contains many sinners who have complained about their sentence. Their cases are reviewed again but once their guilt is re-established they receive added punishments for their unrepentant attitudes.
- b. In addition to crimes against Buddhism and Confucianism this hell features many political criminals.

- Seventh Hell: The Hot Hell

- a. Sinners who violated the Confucian relationships, men who used fetuses to prolong their lives or as aphrodisiacs, and women who mistreated their servants, caused the death of others through gossip, or induced their husbands to cheat are found here.
- b. This hell features an oil kettle for the torture of its sinners.

- Eighth Hell: Superlative Hot Hell

- a. This hell is for those who violated Confucianism, for bandits, and for those involved in certain types of sex crimes such as running a brothel.
- b. There are two Nai-He Bridges in this hell, one of which leads virtuous people directly to the tenth hell, and one which is difficult for sinners to cross and includes copper snakes and iron fish that attack these sinners below.

- Ninth Hell: A-bi (Avici) Hell

- a. This hell contains the writers of exotic literature, painters of erotic scenes, producers of sexual instruments, and those who murdered both people and animals, committed crimes against the state, and failed to serve their parents well.

- Tenth Hell: Hell of Reincarnation

- a. This hell features a building which is 365 stories tall and overlooks the entire world. It also houses eight offices: the first office checks the file of the deceased, the next decides the conditions for their next life, the third deals with those who were evil and deserve an unpleasant rebirth, the fourth balances good and deeds life through the soul's rebirth, the fifth determines the length of the next life, the sixth determines the future marriage, the seventh deals with special cases, and in the eighth souls are given symbols of their future form in life.
- b. With these symbols souls next arrive at what Eberhard has termed "a kind of amusement park" where Mother Meng and her waitress assistant serve the "drink of forgetfulness" to all souls before their rebirth.
- c. The tenth hell features the punishment of many famous Chinese criminals and dishonest businessmen within an iron circle.
- d. The tenth hell houses the City of Those who Died without Cause.
- e. The tenth hell also includes the "Blood-Dirt River" which serves as punishment to women who had abortions or committed infanticide and for monks who violated the rule of chastity.

APPENDIX 8

Comparison of Ancient and Contemporary:

This is a list of similarities between ancient and contemporary practices found in *Record of a Journey to the Halls of Heaven* (Yang 1981:37-38) and translated by the author.

1. Ancient people reversed the techniques of *yin* and *yang*. Modern people have invented electric lights and darkness can be changed into daytime. This light allows people to be as busy at night as those within a night market. Daytime is no longer scarce.
2. Ancient people knew techniques which allowed them to harness the fog and clouds. Modern people ride in airplanes and are shuttled back and forth through the clouds. This is one of science and technology's advancements.
3. Ancient people learned techniques to alter the location of stars. Today, people can change their hearts or exchange their kidneys. People can also use the five major internal organs of dogs and monkeys for transplant. This is just like the ability to change the location of stars.
4. Ancient people studied techniques which allowed them to harness the five elements. This means that they controlled metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Today, water has been overcome through the invention of the submarine. Machines that spurt metal have been invented and the earth has been infiltrated through its caves. Of the five elements, these three have been controlled.
5. Ancient people knew techniques for divining the future. Modern people have invented radar, which as a military weapon can warn of approaching enemy warships. Radar can also detect approaching typhoons and other changing weather. Science can divine what will occur in the future.
6. Ancient people knew techniques that could allow their bodies to fly through the air. Modern people travel in planes and on trains; instantly conveyed to different areas.
7. Ancient people knew techniques to move mountains and fill the sea. Modern people can use explosives or drilling machines and bulldozers to push mountains into the sea.
8. Ancient people knew the hidden dragon, crouching tiger technique. Modern people use the electric whip and can also tame the dragon and hide the tiger.
9. Ancient people mastered the technique of five thunders. Modern people can use a computer to control – with a touch of their finger – the detonation of explosives. This will similarly produce a deafening roar, just like the technique of five thunders.

10. Ancient people had techniques for hearing and seeing from a distance. Modern people have television transmitters and can see images over thousands of miles which is called “seeing 1,000 miles.”⁵⁶⁸ The telephone is used for communication and voices can be heard from over 10,000 miles away. This is called “hearing from afar.”⁵⁶⁹

11. Ancient people knew the turning sprinkled beans into soldiers technique.⁵⁷⁰ Modern people can produce many explosives. When these bombs explode into space it is much like the scattering of beans, yet the people that these explosions kill is limitless.

⁵⁶⁸ The characters employed here are 千里眼, the name of a protector deity for Guanyin.

⁵⁶⁹ The characters here are 順風耳, the name of a protector deity for Guanyin.

⁵⁷⁰ This common saying now means, “To work miracles.”

APPENDIX 9
The Palace of Southern Heaven: Zhanghua, Taiwan



A.1 This is the entrance to hell at the Palace of Southern Heaven.



A.2 The Naihe Bridge which leads to hell (this bridge features hydraulics that cause one to feel as if they are falling into hell).

First Court: King Qinguang



A.3 This court is focused on the business of the mortal world. The underworld officials' *Register of Life and Death* decides purgatory's fortune or misfortune. Before punishment is meted out, all benevolent and virtuous people must pass the "mirror of retribution" before receiving their rebirth or being escorted to the various courts to receive their final judgment. Those people who have pursued righteousness are reborn into positions of wealth and power while those who committed severe sins are escorted into hell to receive their bitter punishments.

Cause:

1. Not protecting female virtue
2. Forging national currency
3. Privately benefiting from the sale of weapons

Effect: Sent to hell to receive bitter punishments and forever unable to rise to heaven.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷¹ This description, and those for the following nine courts of hell, is a direct translation from the mythological theme park's placards.

Second Court: King Chujiang



A.4 This is a lesser department of hell.

Cause: Those people in the mortal world who were not loyal or righteous.

Effect: All will receive the punishment of being pierced through the heart and stabbed in the eyes.

Cause: Not loyal to one's official post.

Effect: Receive the punishment of being pierced through the heart.

Cause: Girls reading worthless books.

Effect: Receive the punishment of having your eyes poked out.

Cause: To secretly harm someone.

Effect: Receive the bitter punishment of being stabbed in the heart numerous times.

Third Court: King Songdi



A.5 The Greater Hell of Dark Restraint and the Lesser Hell of Establishment.

If violated: Stone Drill Hell and the Copper Snake Hell

Cause: Greedy and corrupt official.

Effect: Hands and feet are broken.

Cause: Digging up people's graves.

Effect: Punished by being pierced through the heart by a stone mortar.

Cause: Establishing a brothel.

Effect: Copper snake painfully bites people's bodies.

Fourth Court: King Wuguan



A.6 Those that commit the sins listed below – generally punished on earth – are also tried and punished impartially in hell.

Cause:

1. Deal drugs.
2. Commit arson.
3. Profit at the expense of others.

Effect: Receive the bitter punishment of having your body roasted on a copper pillar.

Cause:

4. Pay large bribes for profit.
5. Cheat and oppress kind-hearted citizens.
6. Hinder people from committing good deeds.
7. Willingly harm people.

Effect: Eternally punished in the millhouse by being bitterly grinded.

Fifth Court: King Senluo



A.7 Greater Hell of Screaming and the additionally established Lesser Hell of Pulling Out Intestines

Cause:

1. Failing to appear in court.
2. Convict citizens without evidence.
3. Plunder at sea.
4. Blackmail and extort.
5. Borrow money and goods without returning it.
6. Rape or kill people.
7. Buy or sell slaves.

Effect: Receive the bitter punishment of having your chest ripped open, your heart pulled out, and your intestines removed.

Wang Xiangtai:



A.8 The Wang Xiangtai is located between the fifth and sixth courts.

Sixth Court: King Biancheng



A.9 Generally, the sins listed below are bitterly punished when the soul enters and is received in purgatory. When those souls' term of punishment has expired they are then sent to the Seventh Court, which investigates if they have committed any other sins.

Cause: Don't respect one's father and mother. Induce others to patronize brothels.

Effect: Receive the bitter punishment of the mountain of knives.

Cause: Kidnap and ransom for money, envy the wealthy while laughing at and ignoring the needy, or coldly murdering another person.

Effect: Head and feet are cut off.

Seventh Court: King Taishan



A.10 The Greater Hot and Irritating Hell surrounded by an additionally established Lesser Hell.

Cause: Commit adultery against one's husband. Commit adultery with the friend of one's wife. Waylay and rob.

Cause: Measure grain improperly and cheat customers.

Effect: Receive the punishment of the heavy weights.

Cause: Don't respect the virtue of unmarried women.

Effect: Receive the bitter punishment of being steamed in a bamboo basket.

Eighth Court: King Dushi



A.11 Mortals that commit the sins below will be justly tried and punished in each court after death.

Cause:

1. Fix the lots for a private loan.
2. Instigate others to commit murder.

Effect: Receive the hell of oil cauldron punishment.

Cause: Say one thing and mean another. Curse heaven and hell.

Effect: Receive the hell of the big saw's punishment,

Ninth Court: King Pingdeng



A.12 If commoners have sinned against the laws of the mortal world or committed one of the “10 sins” then, upon death, they will receive punishment in each court. If they have not yet been through the previous courts they must return to receive their punishments.

Cause:

1. Instigate people to argue.
2. Ruin the good in people.

Effect: Receive the bitter piercing of the tongue punishment.

Cause:

1. Produce unlicensed tobacco.

Effect: Use the stone car to run over people’s bodies.

Tenth Court: King Zhuanlun



A.13 This court is exclusively charged with separating souls after examination and sending them to the four departments of reincarnation, one for men and one for women, longevity, youth, wealth and high position and destitution.

Cause:

1. Not harmonious with brothers.
2. Pursuing carnal pleasure.

Effect: Reborn into a life of misfortune as a wild beast or fowl.



A.14 Department of Reincarnation: Souls are bestowed with rebirth.



A.15 Mother Meng: The deity Mother Meng serves the soup of oblivion to all souls in order to cause them to forget prior existences and they are sent to be reincarnated.

Mulian Rescues his Mother:



A.16 Mulian moves on a track through a gate marked “*Abi Diyu*,” the lowest realm of hell, where he finally locates his mother.

The Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts:



A.17 The entrance sign includes the saying, “Horrors are concealed within, do not enter unless you are brave.”⁵⁷²

⁵⁷² The smaller sign in the back informs visitors that there is no smoking and thanks them for their cooperation.



A.18 This is the first scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.19 This is the second scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.20 This is the third scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.21 This is the fourth scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.22 This is the fifth scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.23 This is the sixth scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.24 This is the seventh scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts. The sign above the door in this funeral scene reads, “Sorrow and Mournful for One’s Companion.”



A.25 This altar is inside the funeral scene and reads, “Ancestors: Led to the Western Paradise.”



A.26 This is the eighth scene in the Realm of Demons and Uncanny Accounts.



A.27 This scene features Li Shi Min touring the underworld.



A.28 This scene features the deity Shangdi going on an inspection trip.



A.29 This is a continuation of Shangdi's procession.



A.30 Ying Tai shown worshipping at a tomb.



A.31 Zhu Baye shown misbehaving.



A.32 Sun Wugong rescuing his Master.



A.33 The Bloody Pond is outside on the first level.

APPENDIX 10
The Prefecture that Represents Heaven: Madou, Taiwan



A.1 Entrance to the eighteen courts of hell (note the box on the right for mandatory donations).



A.2 A bas relief of demons and their captors leads down the staircase to hell.

First Court: King Qinguang



A.3 First Hell: The major sins committed during one's lifetime will banish one to hell to receive punishment. Souls are forced into each court to receive the punishment that they deserve.⁵⁷³

Second Court: King Chujiang

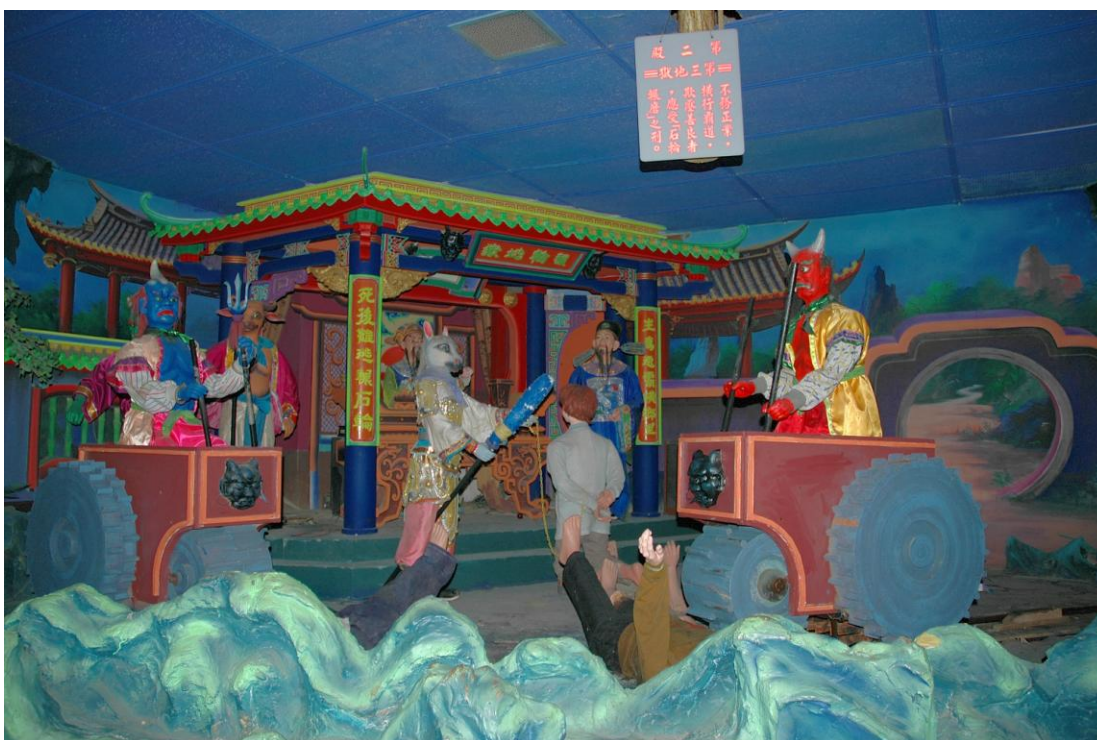


A.4 Second Hell: This hell was established for greedy officials who abuse their authority and make life uncomfortable for the general populace. These officials will receive the "tiger head" beheading punishment.

⁵⁷³ All descriptions are translated from the mythological theme park's placards.



A.5 This ghostly scene features an animatronic ghost, skeleton, and a coffin with the character for longevity (*shou* 壽).



A.6 Third Hell: If one doesn't fulfill one's duty righteously – ruling violently and oppressing those who wish to do good – they will receive the “grinding stone wheel” punishment.

Third Court: King Songdi



A.7 Fourth Hell: Those that rape women, committed adultery, or have harmed their husbands will receive the “roasting pan” punishment.



A.8 This is the Bloody Pond.



A.9 Fifth Hell: Those who desire to be privately wealthy or harm others by committing perjury will receive the “gouging out of the eyes” punishment.

Fourth Court: King Wuguan



A.10 Sixth Hell: Those who buy and sell drugs or produce fake medicine and counterfeit alcohol will receive the “boiled in oil cauldron” punishment.



A.11 Seventh Hell: Those who cheat women and children using the illegal “immortals leap” method of fraud, take people’s money, or destroy families by harming their ancestors will receive the “stone awl piercing the heart” punishment.

Fifth Court: King Yanluo



A.12 Eighth Hell: Those who use underhanded methods to improperly weight scales and greedily horde profits will receive the “dog eating, snake biting” punishment.



A.13 Ninth Hell: Those who don't show proper respect to their elders and are disobedient to their parents will receive the "large weight" punishment.

Sixth Court: King Biancheng



A.14 Tenth Hell: Those who molest and rape women or kill people will receive the "dividing carcass" punishment at the hands of five ghosts.



A.15 This scene is labeled “The Ghost of One Who has Committed Suicide by Hanging.”



A.16 Eleventh Hell: Those who commit larceny or cheat and lie to harm people will receive the “millstone” punishment.



A.17 This is the Vampire's Cave.

Seventh Court: King Taishan



A.14 Twelfth Hell: Those who rob, murder, or plunder for wealth will receive the "hacking of the four limbs" punishment.



A.15 Thirteenth Hell: Those who do not respect one's daughter-in-law and women who are disobedient to their parents-in-law will receive the "stone press" punishment.

Eighth Court: King Dushi



A.16 Fourteenth Hell: Those who only pursue objects, live easy lives, buy and sell slaves, or undermine the family will receive the "scraping face" punishment.



A.17 This is Knife Mountain.



A.18 This is the Cave of Female Ghosts.



A.19 Fifteenth Hell: Those who cheat organization out of money or harm people by committing suicide through drowning or hanging will receive the “rip open and pull out intestines” punishment.

Ninth Court: King Pingdeng



A.20 Sixteenth Hell: Those who gamble, commit fraud, and sell counterfeit ranks will receive the “slicing of the abdomen” punishment.



A.21 Ghostly graveyard with the common surname Wang (王) featured on the most prominent grave.



A.22 Seventeenth Hell: Those who focus on stirring up and inciting trouble, falsely accuse others of crimes, and exhort others to commit murder will receive the “pull out the tongue and pierce the cheeks” punishment.

Tenth Court: King Zhuanolun



A.23 Eighteenth Hell: After drinking Mother Meng's soup, evidence is received to determine the status of the next life and through "reincarnation" souls are born again.



A.24 This is the Wheel of Reincarnation.

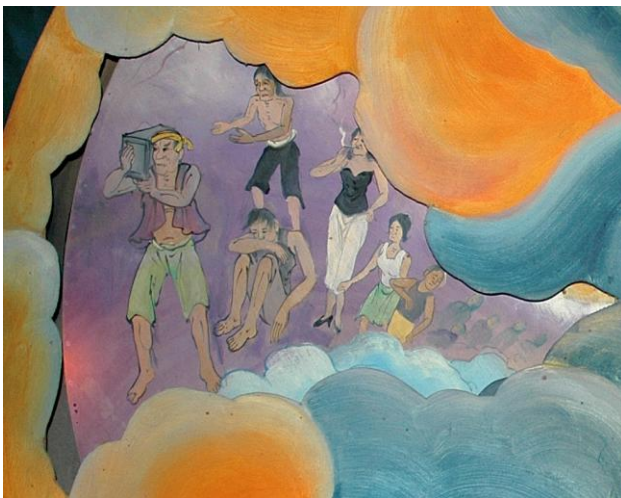
Six Stages of Reincarnation:



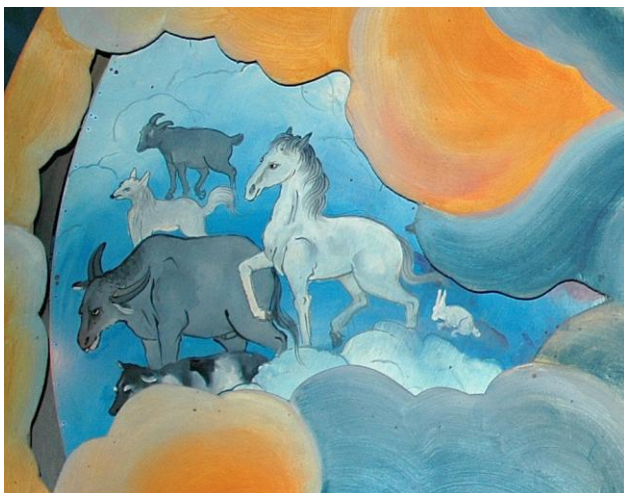
A.25 First Stage: Immortal



A.26 Second Stage: Virtuous Human



A.27 Third Stage: Commoner



A.28 Fourth Stage: Quadruped



A.29 Fifth Stage: Fowl, Reptile, Amphibian



A.30 Sixth Stage: Insect or Fish



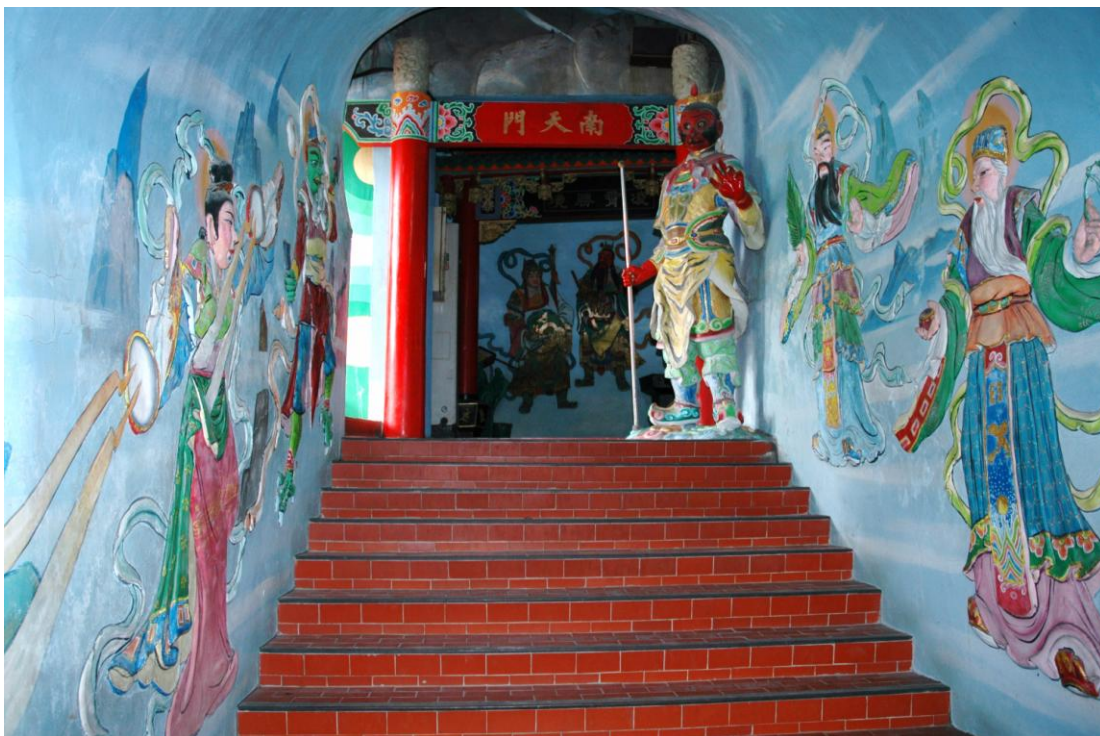
A.31 Mother Meng serves her “tea of oblivion” to souls as they depart hell.



A.32 This is the entrance to heaven (with mandatory donation box on the right).



A.33 This is the hallway to heaven featuring the virtuous in modern clothing.



A.34 The Gate of Southern Heaven guarded by Monkey from *Journey to the West*.



A.35 Immortals and gods meet with the Jade Emperor and attempt to lead people towards righteousness.



A.36 This is the Hall of the Examination and Division of Good and Evil.



A.37 This is where virtuous men and women are selected to attend heaven's festivities.



A.38 This is where gods and immortals come to relax and drink tea.



A.39 This is where the immortal maidens comes to dance.



A.39 This is the pavilion where gods and immortals watch the immortal women and drink tea.



A.40 This is the forest where immortals play music.



A.41 This is where gods and immortals play chess.



A.42 This is a depiction of the myth of the Cowherd and Weaver.



A.43 The disciples of Buddha listen to his teachings.



A.44 The tour of heaven concludes at the stairway coming out of the dragon's mouth.

APPENDIX 11

Pure Land Cave: Light of Buddha Mountain



A.1 This is the entrance to the Pure Land Cave.

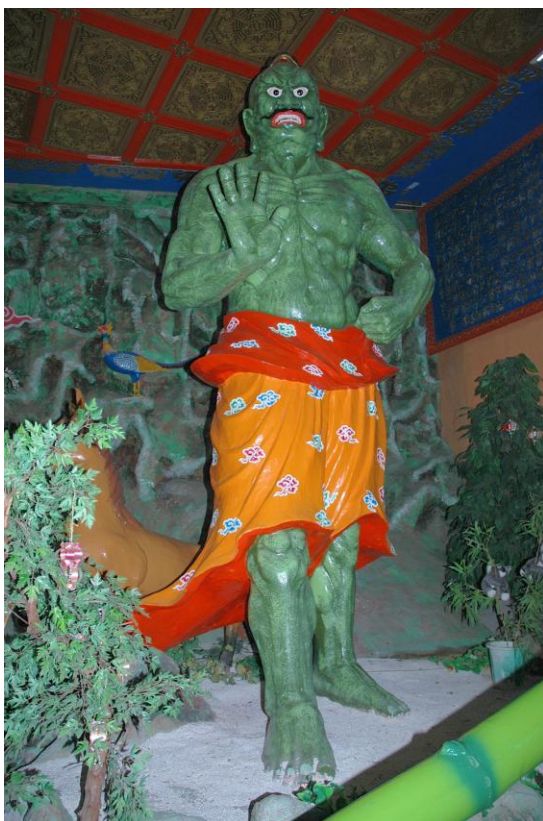


A.2 This is a scene called "Buddha Transforms the World."⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁴ All descriptions are translated from the mythological theme park's placards.



A.3 This is the second half of the scene “Buddha Transforms the World.”



A.4 Guardian Deity



A.5 Guardian Deity



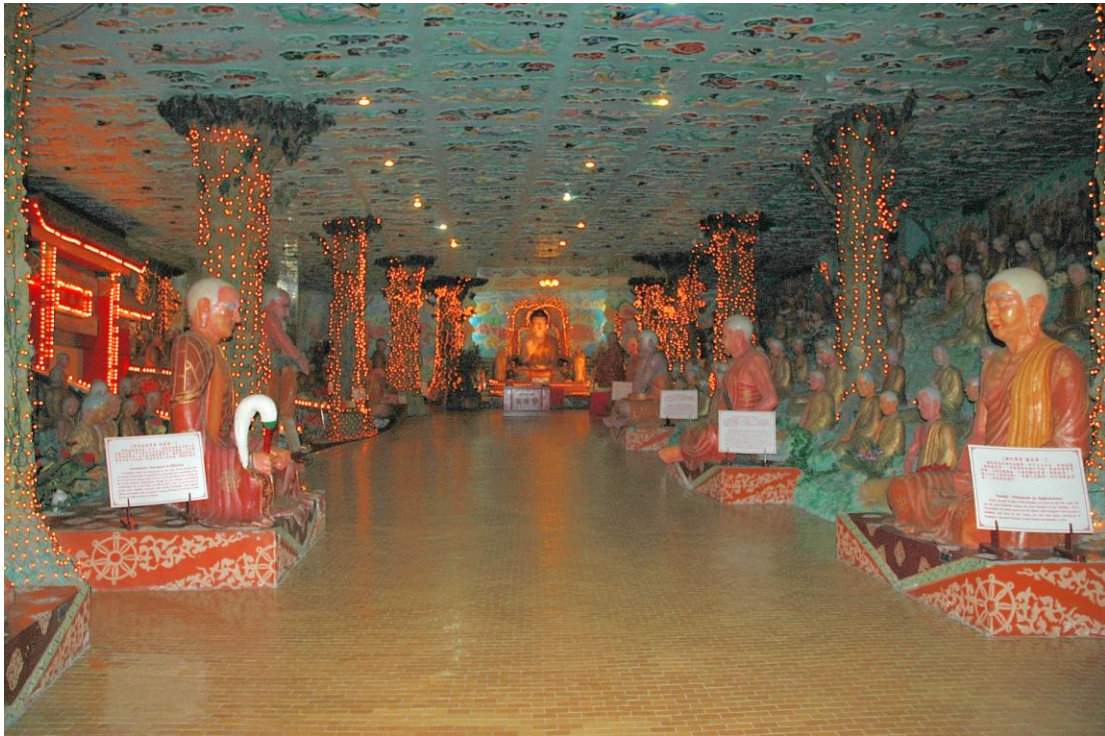
A.6 Dhrtarastra (on left): The “King Who Maintains the Nation” is one of the four Dharma guardians and he resides in the eastern district of Mt. Sumeru. He protects the Dharma and all under heaven, thus he is said to protect the world and maintain the nation. He rules over the *gandharvas* and the *pisacas*.

Virupaksa (on right): The “King Who Sees All” resides in the western district of Mt. Sumeru. He watches from heaven and aids and assists sentient beings while protecting them. He rules over the *nagas* and *putanas*. Of the four kings he is said to be in charge of punishing evil people and commanding them to change their ways.



A.7 Virudhaka (on left): The “King Who is the Patron of Growth” resides in the southern district of Mt. Sumeru. He assists sentient beings, can conquer evil, and helps the roots of virtue to grow. He rules over the *kumbhandas*.

Vaisravana (on right): The “King Who Hears Everything” resides in the northern district of Mt. Sumeru. He rules over the *yaksas*, protects monasteries, and hears everything. Thus he is called the King of Great Learning.



A.8 This is the Hall of the Buddha's Disciples and Arhats.



A.9 This scene is labeled "The Teachings of the Buddha." Note: the sign on the donation box reads, Teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha: Light of Buddha Mountain Prayer Cards (joyfully cultivate merit).



A.10 Cave of Nine Grades⁵⁷⁵



A.11 Lowest Stage of the Elementary Level: A person who has committed the five grave deeds and the ten unwholesome deeds will be sent to the evil realms in his/her next birth. However, if at the time of death they encounter a wise advisor who tells them to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha and to contemplate on the name ten times, he/she will be able to eliminate the boundless cycle of birth and death. He/she will then take his/her next birth in the Pure Land and reside in the lotus realm for twelve great eons (mahakalpa). When the lotus blossoms, he/she will have the opportunity to listen to the teachings of Avalokitesvara and to generate a *bodhi* mind.

⁵⁷⁵ These Nine Grades (*jiu pin* 九品) are linked closely to the Pure Land tradition. These nine grades of development achieved in one's previous life determine one's distance to Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land (Soothill 16).



A.12 Intermediate Stage of the Elementary Level: A person who has killed, stolen, and committed other negative deeds should be reborn in the hell realm. However, if at the time of death he/she encounters genuine sages to teach the supreme brightness of Amitabha Buddha and the practices of discipline, concentration, and wisdom, his/her boundless crimes will be eliminated. With the guidance of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, he/she will be reborn in the Pure Land and reside in the lotus realm for six eons. When the lotus blossoms, he/she will have the opportunity to listen to the teachings of Avalokitesvara and to generate a *bodhi* mind.



A.13 Highest Stage of the Elementary Level: A person who has done many evil deeds in his/her life, and if at the time of death has the opportunity to encounter great sages to learn the Mahayana sutras and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha, he/she will be able to eliminate his/her boundless crimes. The buddhas and bodhisattvas will receive him/her and he/she will be reborn in the lotus realm. After forty-nine days when the lotus blossoms, Avalokitesvara will give him/her the teachings and after ten lesser eons (*antarakalpa*) he/she will attain the first abode of bodhisattvahood.



A.14 Lowest Stage of the Intermediate Level: Any man or woman who shows compassion and filial piety to their parents, at the time of death, will have the opportunity to listen to the teachings of ultimate bliss in the Western Paradise, upon their death, and the great vows of Amitabha Buddha will cause them to be reborn in the Pure Land. After seven days, Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva will teach him/her. With the joy of the dharma he/she will attain the first stage of sainthood (*srota-apanna*), and after one lesser eon (*antarakalpa*) will attain the stage of arhathood.



A.15 Intermediate Stage of the Intermediate Level: Those who observe the eight precepts for a day and night and are well-disciplined and devoted to transferring the merits of the Pure Land will be received at the time of death by Amitabha and Mahasattvas holding a seven-treasure lotus. He/she will have his/her last breath sitting on the lotus and be reborn in the Pure Land. After seven days when the lotus blossoms, he/she will meet the Buddha, listen to the dharma joyfully and, after half an eon, he/she will attain arhathood.



A.16 Highest Stage of the Intermediate Level: Those who observe the five (or eight) precepts and devote themselves to transferring their beneficial deeds to being reborn in the Pure Land. They will see Amitabha and the congregation of holy saints at the time of death. They will be given teachings on the merit of renunciation and will have their last breath sitting on a lotus to be reborn in the Pure Land. When the lotus blossoms they will have the opportunity to listen to the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and attain the stage of arhathood.



A.17 Lowest Stage of the Advanced Level: Those who understand the law of cause and effect, praise Mahayana Buddhism, and generate a mind of utmost sincerity will transfer their merit in order to be reborn in the Pure Land. At the time of death, the buddhas and bodhisattvas will manifest as five hundred buddhas to receive them. They will sit on the golden lotus until their last breath and be reborn in the Pure Land. After seven days they will meet the Buddha and spend twenty-one days listening to the dharma and giving offerings to the buddhas of the ten directions. After two lesser eons (*antarakalpa*) they will live in the Pramudita (the bodhisattva's stage of joy).



A.18 Intermediate Stage of the Advanced Level: A person who sees the law of cause and effect, praises Mahayana Buddhism, understands the ultimate truth, and devotes their merits to being reborn in the Pure Land will be received by Amitabha and Mahasattvas at the time of death. He/she will have their last breath sitting on a purple platform and be reborn in the Pure Land. When the lotus blossoms, he/she will have the opportunity to listen to the wondrous dharma with great devotion and give offerings to the buddhas of the ten directions. After one lesser eon (*antarakalpa*), he/she will attain the highest peaceful equanimity in receiving the truth.



A.19 Highest Stage of the Advanced Level: A person who is compassionate and upholds the precepts well and also recites the sutras and sincerely transfers merits will be reborn in the Pure Land. At the time of death, Avalokitesvara will come to receive them holding the diamond platform. He/she will have their last breath sitting on the golden platform and be reborn in the Pure Land. At once, by listening to the dharma, he/she will attain the highest peaceful equanimity, giving offerings to the buddhas of ten directions and reside in the Pure Land.



A.20 Association of Lotus Pond and Sea. The sign on the left reads, “If people light a lotus flower lamp, one’s home and residence will be peaceful and full of joy. The buddhas will bestow their protection, calamity will be dispelled, and longevity and fortune will increase.” The sign continues with a similar quote from a Buddhist sutra and ends with the statement, “Amitabha Buddha, Limitless Merit.”



A.21 The words “Wonderful Realm of Paradise” are written above the doorway to this scene and visitors are asked by the sign in the middle not to step across the lotus flowers.



A.22 These are immortal women.



A.23 This is a Buddhist mendicant.



A.24 This scene features a pagoda and rainbow bridge.



A.25 These are mirrors in paradise.



A.26 Below these Buddhas, visitors can pay 10NT to view other worlds.



A.27 This is a row of Buddhas.



A.28 This scene features the Six Directions of the Buddhas Praise.



A.29 This is monks listening to the Buddha.



A.30 These are teachings from the assembly of birds.



A.31 Here are more mirrors across from the assembly of birds.



A.32 This is a grotto with the Buddha.



A.33 Here is a pantheon of Buddhas and box for donations.



A.34 This prayer wheel reads, "If this dharma wheel is turned often the Buddha will daily increase your glory."



A.35 The Pure Land Cave ends with a gift shop.

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